CILAPPATIKARAM

Translated by

Dr. R. S. Pillai

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TAMIL UNIVERSITY
THANJAVUR

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INTRODUCTION

Cilappatikaram composed by *Ilanko* is a world classic, considered purely as literature. For centuries it was in palmleaf manuscript. In 1892 it was printed in full for the first time by Dr. *U.V. Caminata Aiyar.* Perhaps its late recognition as a great work worthy to be placed alongside Homer's is due to this fact that the full text was not available before.

The text, as known today, is not fully authentic. The preface, the verses at the end of ten cantos, and even the whole of the third part, that is *Vanci*, are regarded by some modern critics as interpolations. Hence there is need for a great deal of textual criticism for fixing the text and making it standard.

It has three parts and thirty cantos; the first part having ten cantos, the second thirteen, and the last seven.

The rules of Aristotle and other Western critics do not apply to *Cilappatikaram* since Tamil literature developed, untouched by Western literary influence in those far-off days. In fact, the name 'epic' sits uneasily on this work. It is *Kappiyam* and not drama, though it contains many dramatic elements. Music predominates in this work, and for that reason, it cannot be an opera. It is throughout in verse form, though some portions are not poetic; these unpoetic parts are designated prose.

The geographical features of the land are poetically presented; the flora and fauna of those ancient times are fully delineated. Besides, the way of life of the people of those distant days is vividly portrayed; both the beauties and blemishes. The arts of music and dance are given a detailed treatment. The professions of agriculture, business and administration are realistically described. In all epics, the main themes are love and war, while in this *Kappiyam* the first part describes human values;

the second deals with man's love for godly virtues, and the third covers both war and piety.

The hero and the heroine are of the trading class, not royal personages. The author rightly thought that refinement of mind and intensity of feeling are essential elements in high tragedy, and he endowed the hero and heroine with these qualities. The southern kings, the *Cola*, the *Pantiya*, and the *Cera*, have important parts to play in this *Kappiyam*. The main story is about *Kovalan*, his wife *Kannaki*, and *Kovalan's* sweetheart, *Matavi*. *Kovalan's* wife *Kannaki* establishes in the course of the story her divine chastity. It is her anklet that gives the title to this *Kappiyam*. *Matavi*, on the other hand, is a courtesan by birth, but descended from *Urvaci*, the dancer in *Indra's* court. *There appears to have been* commerce between mortals and gods in those days. It is said that one of the *Pantiyan* kings helped God *Indra*, when *Indra* was attacked, and that the grateful god had sent a genie to guard the *Pantiyan* capital, *Maturai*.

More than reason, fate plays a crucial role in the *Kappiyam*; the misunderstanding between *Kovalan* and *Matavi*, and the wrong judgement of the *Pantiyan* king against *Kovalan* are two great examples.

Ilanko, the author, is traditionally considered a Jain monk; he had renounced royal power in favour of his elder brother, who became a *Cera* king. It was said that a *Cera* king who marched his army to the Himalayas, defeated the arrogant Aryan kings -- *Kanakar* and *Vijayar*, and brought a holy stone for the idol of *Kannaki* which was worshipped as the goddess of chastity.

The epic or *Kappiyam* in Indian literary tradition should contain moral and spiritual truths. The preface to this work sets out three of these specifically:

1. *Karma* or fate is continuous and inexorable.

2. Justice is the bedrock of a King's rule; it kills him whenever justice is violated.

3. A woman of chastity is holy; even gods respect her.

Amatory life is recognized as perhaps the way of life both for the high and the low. Women's beauty is described in a stylised way; her mons veneris is said to resemble the hood of the cobra, other parts described are carp-like eyes, high bosom etc.

In translating the work I have come across certain problems, two of which are dealt with below: the first relates to the Festival to *Indra* for which the author has devoted one canto. Modern historians say that Vedic God *Indra's* importance declined in the epic age. There is no temple in Tamil Nadu dedicated to *Indra*. Even though *Tolkappiyam* mentions that

Indra is the presiding deity of *Marutam* or agricultural land, Gods like *Civa, Vishnu,* and *Murukan* came to prominence in the epic age. Why should *Ilanko* give prominence to a Vedic God? The reasons are not far to seek. Ilanko, who was a Jain monk, was interested in spreading religious toleration among the people, and for that purpose he chose *Indra* who is common to the Hindus, the Jains and the Buddhists. Another reason may be that the author, in trying to picture the merry mood of the people of *Pukar*, chose *Indra* who was himself a voluptuary and a lover of the arts of music and dance. It is worth noting that other gods are mentioned with respect and reverence in this *Kappiyam.*

Secondly in the third canto it is mentioned that the *Cola* king after witnessing the wonderful dance of *Matavi*, conferred on her the title *'Talaikoli'* and presented to her a necklace of green gems, but the matter for consideration is whether 1008 pieces of gold were the worth of the necklace or whether the king gave her one thousand and eight pieces of gold in addition. I have taken the view that the king gave the title and the necklace and nothing more. The cash prize is said to be the price of *Matavi's* favours for a day. If that is so, *Matavi* would be reduced to an ordinary courtesan who sells her charms to every rich customer. Such a view would be contrary to the theme of the *Kappiyam* depicting *Matavi's* faithfulness to *Kovalan*, her lover.

To make the translation crisp, I have chosen rhymes at the end of lines, as in English verse, whereas in Tamil verse, rhymes occur in the beginning of lines. As it is not possible to translate Tamil metrical pattern in English, I have not attempted it. The criteria adopted are readability, faithfulness to the original, and bringing over however, imperfectly, the poetic flavour of the original.

There exist three English translations of *Cilappatikaram.* The first one was by *Ramachandra Dikshitar* of Madras University. It was published in 1939 by Oxford University Press; and it was written in prose and its main concern seems to be historical. Another feature is that he gives all the technical terms relating to dance and music in transliteration, and explains what they mean in the footnotes. He does this also with regard to the names of trees, flowers etc., occurring in the original. The value of the translation lies in its being the pioneer, and the enormous pains taken by the translator in collecting information, both puranic and historical. His conclusions, especially about the date of composition have been superseded. This translation fails to bring out that the *Kappiyam* is a literary work of great eminence.

The second translation came out in 1967; it was by Danielou, a French savant. He translated this Tamil classic in French and later in English for UNESCO In his introduction, he speaks of the highly developed arts of dance and music, in which he was mainly interested. His inadequacy of Tamil and the customs of Tamilians proved a great handicap as translator of a Tamil classic poem. Though his French version was rendered into idiomatic and readable English, the work as a whole cannot be said

to be a complete and faithful translation of the original. It no doubt contains verses and songs also. Danielou condenses certain portions and misinterprets some passages. The most glaring of these misinterpretations occurs in the translation of line 20[4] of canto 5. This translation has not become popular with the discriminating reader.

The third translation published in 1977 was by *K.N.Subramanyan* who is essentially a creative writer in Tamil. As a translator from Tamil to English, he used devices that are considered good in Tamil style. This does not sound well in English. In readability it falls short of Danielou's translation.

I have ventured into this work of translation, avoiding the pitfalls of the earlier translations. English equivalents, wherever possible, of Tamil technical words are used in the text itself. A few other names are transliterated, and their meanings are given in the notes at the end of the book.

The texts used are by *U.V.Caminata Aiyar*, *Venkatacami Nattar*, and *Kecikan*. A short bibliography of the books consulted, besides other books used as reference works are given at the end of this book.

R. S. Pillai.

Preface

The *kuravas* of the hills, awed by a miraculous event,
Rushed to a holy man in their predicament;
His reverence was a monk *Ilanko* of *Kunavayil* monastery,
And had been a prince of *Kutanatu* family.

"We saw under the cool shade of a *venkai* kino tree
With golden flowers, a noble lady of quality
Who had lost one breast; and there did descend
Celestial beings, among whom was her husband;
And with them she soared heavenwards.
This miracle we have seen is beyond words."

At this, *Cattan* a Tamil savant, interjecting
'I know how it befell,' narrated the following:
"*Kovalan*, a rich merchant of *Pukar*, the capital city
Of the *Colas* whose king had the floral symbol of *atti*,
Took a lovely and talented courtesan as mistress,
And was, after a time, reduced to woeful distress;
Returning to his wife *Kannaki* in a mood dismal,
He decided to use her anklets as wherewithal
To rebuild his fortune at *Maturai*, the *Pantiyan* capital.

Together they trudged their way to the far-off city,
Where *Kovalan* met a goldsmith of obvious prosperity;
The anklet that *Kovalan* showed looked like one
Of the queen's that the goldsmith had stolen;
Asking *Kovalan* to wait, he rushed to the king,
Who, in a perturbed state and without thinking,
Ordered the execution of the thief, and recovery
Of the anklet; *Kovalan* was killed and the king was guilty.
Kannaki on hearing this, wept and felt orphaned;

Her righteousness brought the king's life to an end.
She tore her left breast, and hurled it with such anger
That *Maturai* was consumed in unquenchable fire.
'The pure and chaste one', the good people called her;
She it was who filled the *kuravas* with wonder."

Ilanko said, "You say that things are destined;
Tell me what happened to them in the end."
"Listen, noble one! In old and illustrious *Maturai*,
In the public hall of the temple of *Civa*, who wore *Konrai*
In his knotted hair, as I lay awake at midnight
I saw this heroic wife in a desperate plight;
The guardian spirit of *Maturai*, appearing before her
Spoke, 'With vengeful wrath you have set fire
To *Maturai* by hurling at it your left breast;
All your sufferings are caused at Fate's behest;
In previous birth you and your husband were cursed
By the wife of *Cankaman*, a merchant of *Cinkapuram*
In *Kalinkanatu* and now its effects are experienced.
Young lady with long luxuriant hair! Some
Fourteen days hence you shall see your husband,
Not in mortal but heavenly form, with a likely band.'
These were truly the words that I heard to the end."

"Justice itself contrives punishment for men of eminence;
The great ones also hold chaste women in reverence;
The sins of one life are paid for in the next existence.
I shall fashion out of this anklet story,
Cilappatikaram, an epic of music and poesy."

"Be pleased to compose this poem, revered one!
As it is to all the three kings of the land common."

Ilanko agreed, and recited his composition
Beginning with the marriage song, and in succession,
The wedded couple setting up family,
The debut of the dancer *Matavi*,
The praise of lovely evening, the festival to *Indra*,
The sea-bath, the song of the sea-board,
The suffering of *Matavi* in early spring,
The nightmare, the couple journeying
Through rural paths, then through forest land,
The song of the hunters, *Maturai* at hand,
Kovalan's exploration of the city,
Kannaki taken as a protegee, the execution
Of *Kovalan*, the shepherdesses' song and dance,
Kannaki's tragic loss, her terrible noonday round,
The guardian spirit's speech, the hill women's dancing round,
The vision of divinity, a temple of the goddess of chastity,
Making a suitable and holy idol and its installation,

Kannaki's blessings, oracular utterances,
And lastly the statement of moral truths.
The whole was composed of prose and verse interwoven
All these were taken down by poet Cattanar,
Who is better know as *Maturai* Grain-dealer
This preface was composed according to tradition
To help the readers know the kind of division.

In Explanation

1. Rain became scarce from that day in *Pantiya* kingdom, and the people suffered from boils and eruptions. At this, the *Pantiya* king from *Korkai*, victorious *Celiyan*, sacrificed one thousand goldsmiths to the idol of *Kannaki*. This pacified her, and rains came in plenty which relieved the distress of the people.

2. On hearing this, the princes of *Konkunatu*, the *Kocars*, combined sacrifice with the festival to goddess *Kannaki*. Thenceforth seasonal rains never failed, and the people were happy.

3. The good news spread to Sri Lanka whose king, *Kayavaku* by name had an altar built for daily sacrifice to the goddess; he also built a temple for her, and in the month of *Ani* (May-June) instituted a festival in the capital. As a result, his country prospered in all fields.

4. The *Cola* king *Perunkilli*, not to lag behind others, chose *Uraiyur* for the construction of a temple to *Kannaki*. He also celebrated a festival daily, and offered worship to the deity every day. His country also became rich and happy.

FOREWORD

Cilappatikaram (the Story of Anklet) popularly known as *Cilampu* (Anklet) is not only one of the five great epics in Tamil literature but also the first epic in Tamil and it has been very popular among Tamil people for centuries with different versions enacted on the stage in the crude form of folk drama. Though there are a number of versions the central theme centers around the heroine *Kannaki*. *Kannaki* who is well known for her unblemished chastity spotless character and faithfulness, gracious silence and shyness is depicted as an embodiment of virtues of an ideal Tamil womanhood in *Cilappatikaram*. The influence of *Cilappatikaram* among the Tamils is such that mere pronouncement of the name *Kannaki* would bring into the minds of Tamils an exalted feeling of chastity, emotional appreciation of faithfulness, the divine qualities of womanhood, the harmonious blending of shyness and softness on the one hand and courage and conviction on the other hand and above all the exalted place of woman enjoyed by them in the early Tamil Society.

Cilappatikaram was written in the second century A.D. and it really reflects the socio-cultural and religious trends of the times. It deals with the story of *Kovalan* and *Kannaki* of merchant families, and it has to be mentioned that while both the western and oriental epics of those days dealt with the stories of kings and queens, gods and goddesses it was left to *Ilango* the author of this great epic to choose the story of a common man and to make a brilliant epic out of it and it is unique in this respect.

Prof. T.P.Meenakshisundaram has dealt with this aspect of the epic in detail and has given the appellation '*Makkal Kappiyam*', 'Epic of Common Man'.

It is true that it is the story of a common man. But it is also true that primarily it is the story of a housewife, the story

of *Kannaki*. It is very often said by various critics that there is no hero except for the heroine. *Kannaki* stands tall among various characters of the epic and the epic itself stands alone not only in the matter of its techniques but also in the theme and the story.

It is a story of a woman of great qualities, who is forsaken by her husband who choses to live with *Matavi* whose enchanting beauty and artistic excellence make him almost her slave. Finally he returns to his wife, goes to *Maturai* with her to sell her anklet and by mistake he is executed by the *Pantiya* king. *Kannaki* realising the folly of the king agitates and in her anger and anguish becomes rebellious, the silent and the shy woman changes into thunderous, the smiling lady into cyclonic. She goes to the king and proves that her husband is innocent and this results in the instant death of the king and the queen and the city goes up in flames and finally *Kannaki* reaches the heavenly abode.

It is not accidental that *Ilango* a young Jain monk has chosen the story of a woman and it is in tune with the long tradition of this part of the country that women were highly respected. It was the order of the day. The Sangam days bear testimony to this and it is very gratifying to note that there were a number of poetesses who were held in high esteem by various kings and chieftains. They were treated well not only as poetesses but as 'friends, philosophers and guides' also. It is well known that *Avvai* of Sangam Age enjoyed great respect and was revered by kings and people. It is remarkable that a young jain monk, has come forward to compose a brilliant epic out of a story of a woman and it is also equally astonishing that a prince-turned poet has chosen the story of a housewife as the theme of his immortal work while other poets of common origin sang songs eulogizing kings and chieftains among other things.

As has already been said this is one of the most fascinating epics which brilliantly depicts the life of a woman, a woman of pristine purity and faithfulness, a woman of great patience and gracious silence and shyness coupled with great conviction and courage. It is true that Indian women are generally shy and silent but when provoked and when there is a danger to their dignity and womanhood they change into the most vociferous and volcanic. A woman of great qualities, chastity and faithfulness is considered holy and she is respected, admired and above all adored even by Gods not to speak of kings and monarchs, intellectuals and illiterates alike. It is this fact that is brought out passionately by the prince poet, *Ilango* who turned to be a Jain monk in this 'Epic of Woman', by the name *Cilappatikaram*.

It is the embodiment of old and cherished tradition enshrined in what the great *Thiruvalluvar* has said:

No god adoring, low she bends before her lord;
Then rising, serves; the rain falls instant at her word!

The Tamil University has recently launched an ambitious project, **Translation Of Tamil Classics Into English** and I am very happy to say that within a short span of time several works have been taken up.

Classics like,

1. Cillappatikaram

2. Manimekalai

3. Bharatiyar Songs

4. Tirukkovaiyar

have been completed and the following are in progress:

5. Akananuru

6. Purananuru

7. Periyapuranam and

8. Kalittokai

I am sure that these translations will be of great use to understand the poetic tradition of Indian Literature in general and Tamil Literature in particular.

12-10-'89,
Thanjavur.

- **Dr. S. Agesthialingom,**
Vice-Chancellor.

BOOK OF PUKAR

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Canto 1 - The Wedding Song

Prayer

Glory be to the Moon, glory be to the Moon!
Benign her rays like the sway of our Sovereign,
Whose flowery garland spills with pollen.

Glory be to the Sun, glory be to the Sun!
Who beams as far as the silver-topp'd mountain;
So does the mandate of the Lord of *Kaviri* run.

Glory be to the Rain, glory be to the Rain!
Its bounty like our King's reign
Makes rich the royal domain.

Glory be to *Pukar*, glory be to *Pukar!*
As its fame grows apace on a par
With the rise of *Cola* power.

Of Pukar City

Be it *Potiyil* or *Imayam* or *Pukar* city,
With its ancient families and unique tradition,
Each will last for ages with undimmed vitality,
Owing to the wise ones who have attained perfection;
Pukar is comparable in fame and splendours
With the broad and fair land of the *Devas* and the *Nagas*.

Introducing the heroine, Kannaki

Manaykan of that city was reputed
For liberality, spontaneous and unstinted
As the rain; and like a golden creeper
Divine was his daughter in her twelfth year,
Beautiful as the goddess of the red lotus,
Perfect as the northern star for virtues,
She held dear, and by her own sex adored;
The name of *Kannaki* she adorned.

Introducing the hero, Kovalan

Ranked among men of eminence
By the noble ruler of this vast land,
Macattuvan possessed great affluence,
And was exceedingly benevolent,
Thus putting by riches in heaven;
His sole heir, *Kovalan*, like *Murukan* at sixteen
Was the beau ideal of many a maiden
Who pined in vain for his affection.

Their Marriage

To unite in holy wedlock such a pair
Most happy was either sire;
Jewelled maids made the proclamation,
Seated on elephants, in royal fashion.

The day of wedding awoke to the clamour
Of the conch, the drum, and the tabor;
White parasols and the sacred thread
Were, as in regal ceremony, paraded.

In a flower-topped hall of diamonded pillars
And under a blue-roofed pavilion
Hung with pearls, bridegroom *Kovalan*
Married the maid, chaste as the star of stars,
Observing vedic rites, on priestly direction
At the blessed time of the conjunction
Of the moon and *Rokini*; the young pair
Walked round the sacred fire
Gazed on by eyes of wonder.

Women of proud bosoms, of glowing complexion,
Of luxuriant hair, of voice golden,
Of soft speech, of shyness and modesty,
Of slender, vine-like bodies -- endowed variously,
Comported according to their natures:
Offering sandal, incense, flowers,
Saffron, and *Kumkum* to visitors;
Carrying bright lamps, shining vessels,
Rounded pots, and sprouting cereals --
Traditional wedding rituals:
Showering flower petals on the bride,
Wished her bond of love never to be untied;
Placing her on a couch they praised her
As the star of chastity come as *avatar*.

In praise of the Cola King

The banner of the leopard waves over
The whole land south of the Himalayas,
Thanks to the *Cola*, than whom none's braver;
May his greater glory come to pass!

Canto 2 - In Praise of the Virtues of Family Life

The fabulous city of Pukar

It was a city of rare distinction,
Where riches served culture as function;
Whatever the sea-girt world could desire
Was to be had at its fabulous fair,
That made the mariners rich beyond compare.
By land and sea came these varied wares
To swell the noble merchants' coffers;
Of these notables the most eminent
As the polestar in the firmament
Were a blue-eyed lady and her husband;
On a beautiful cot that seemed fashioned
By the divine artisan, they reclined.

The South wind blows

Bluebell buds and blossoms, lilies,
Lotus flowers redolent of bees,
Fragrant flowers of the fields,
Flowers wild, screwpine golden,
And *Cenpaka* were in riotous bloom;
Having supped heartily their pollen,
The bees sought the pleasant perfume
Of the curled locks of women with shining faces,
And accompanied by the refreshing southwind,
Stole through the narrow interstices
Of the hanging rows of window-blind.

The lovers felt Southwind's soft caress,
And surging with passionate ardour
Ascended the moon-blanched terrace
Of their mansion where the god of summer,
Had taken his station with flowery arrows.

Flood of love

Their couch was strewn with flowers fresh-blown,
Eager desire drew them closer;
They appeared like the sun and the moon;
His tremulous fingers dipped in the batter
Of sandal went round her breasts;
They commingled in love's outbursts,
His garland of jasmine, and hers of lilies
Got crushed and tangled in the rallies;
Changing his posture he gazed at her face,
And words of love streamed without cease.

Kovalan praises the beauty of Kannaki,

"Though Lord *Civa* lifted the crescent moon to adorn
His matted hair, applauded by the hosts of heaven,
You, as *Lakshmi;* by virtue of primogeniture,
Claimed the crescent for investiture

his wife

On your fair forehead, to enhance its lustre.
To your eyebrows the god of love gave his bow
As is the custom a defenceless foe to endow;
Your waist has the slenderness of *Indra's Vaccira*
Given as reward for preceding *amrita;*
The six-faced god lent his shining spear
To your eyes, my heart to conquer,
Though he had no cause against me for rancour."

"The dark-feathered, sapphire-complexioned peacock,
Abashed by your elegance, hides in the woods;
The swan, unnerved by the beauty of your gait,
Hides among the watery field flowers;
The green parrots are dumb before your sweet voice;
Should you not have pity for them?
You paragon among women,, with artless speech
Sweeter than flute, vina, and ambrosia mingled,
And with gait full modest; the parrots pricked by envy
Of your voice, keep you company."

"Thou lovely nymph, fair as a fragrant flower,
Whose beauty no adornment needs to flatter!
Why do thy handmaids vainly labour?
Bright little flowers set off the dark silky hair,
Why then do they hang garlands also there?
Bathing the hair in the fumes of myrrh is in order,
Why then do they repeat it with musk odour?
Painting *toyyil* on your divine bosom is handsome,
Is not a coral necklace burdensome?
Your bright face jades, your waist is weary
Bearing the weight of all this finery;
Have they indeed gone crazy?"

"Thou art precious as beaten gold,
Thou art a pearl born of coral rare,
Pure fragrant honey, sweet as sweetest cane,
Blended perfume, heavenly nymph,
Life's talisman, scion of purest blood,
Shall I call thee a flawless diamond
Not born of mountains, the food of the gods
Not born of the milky ocean, or melody
Not born of vina? Dear lady
With long dark flowing hair,
How shall I depict you in the fulness of joy?"
Endlessly he sang paeans of her,
Steeped in love's prolonged ardour.

One day, *Kovalan's* mother, of long luxuriant hair,
And generosity, out of abounding love for the pair,
Wished to instal them in separate quarters,

So that that could patronise scholars,
Play host to guests, and earn a name themselves;
For this purpose she made all arrangements,
And saw them properly settled; and years passed
In this fashion; honours they acquired.

They filled every moment with happiness,
Well aware of life's precariousness;
Like intertwined serpents, or *Kama* and *Rati*,
Their conjugal love was deep and merry.
No alloy marred their pure affection.

Canto 3 - The Debut

The ancestry of Matavi

The Sage of the Sacred Hills was to anger
Roused at *Urvaci's* insouciance to dance,
Responsive as she was to the passionate glance
Of *Indra's* son, and cursed the pair for their error
To be born on earth to expiate their sin;
They in human existence learnt the lesson
Of pure devotion to art, and won redemption.

Matavi's training

Their descendant was *Matavi* of divine shoulders
Of a softness rivalling that of flowers.
Gifted she was by birth and tradition
With music, dance, and loveliness;
Of these she became past mistress
After a seven year dedication.
Her debut was under royal patronage
When she was but twelve years of age.

Her dance master

Master of the theory of the basic art forms,
Of classical and popular dances,
Her mentor knew how to mix viable norms
To evolve eleven aesthetic balances,
Song and accompaniment to match,
Making a perfect masterpiece of each.

Music

The music director in true native tradition

director

Made every composition an aesthetic creation
The music of poetry, of the reed and of the string
He fused together to suit the rhythms of dancing.

The poet

The poet composer was a known scholar
Throughout Tamilnadu who was a master
Of the language, following the tradition
Mentioned on popular and scientific music;
Understanding the music master's technique,
He accompanied the music to perfection
Knowing the slang used by the uneducated
He changed it so that the effect was unaffected.

Percussion artist

With perfect knowledge of dance, song,
Language, style, rhythm, and when they go astray,
In addition to folk tradition, the percussion artist
Used a double stroke for any important beat,
His sense of rhythm dictated when to give free play
To the lament of the flute, and soft accent of the songs;
He controlled the voice of his own instrument
So that the audience may hear other sounds
And at time; he drowned all other sounds
In the voice of his own instrument.

The reed musician

Knowing both aesthetic combination and its opposite,
And being as great an artist as the poet composer,
He used the four rhythms, and could harmonise
His play to suit the music of the percussion artist;
And the singer's voice; moreover he could produce
Each word of the song; he too went with *Matavi*.

The Vina artist

Of the two sets of seven notes, the artist
In order to show his cleverness with one set,
Played it with exquisite skill;
Then all the fourteen strings were touched
And all the notes of Palai were produced;
The sequence of modes was next shown;
He harmonised the vina musical domain
With that of the flute - a different sort;
He had trained the danseuse *Matavi*
In the subtleties of his own art.

The Stage

Faithful to the traditions prescribed
Was the site of the stage selected;
From holy mountains a bamboo was taken
That measured twenty four thumbs of a man
Between two knots; this was one unit of length.

The stage was eight units in length
Seven in breadth and one in height;

On all four sides pillars were erected,
And on these, ceiling planks were fixed;
The ceiling was at the proper height;
For entrance and exit two doors were provided;
On top were figures of four kinds of genie,
For the assembled audience to pray and adore;
To avoid shadows cast by the pillars,
Pedestal lamps were kept in right places;
Three kinds of curtains were hung,
The stage curtain, the door curtain, and the drop curtain,
And figured cloth covered the ceiling.

Talaikkol

Captured in battle, a royal parasol
Provided the stem fit for *talaikkol;*
Stem with gold and precious stones inset
Was in the audience hall proudly set
As symbol of the Patron of Dance Divine,
Jayantan -- Lord *Indra's* son.
On this festive day it was in a regal
Procession taken to the dance hall
And placed in prominence, its head
Facing the audience distinguished.

Royalty's Presence

The stately procession reached the royal theatre
Where the king and his courtiers took-places of honour,
Each according to his rank in the hierarchical order;
Now the musicians took their accustomed corner.

The dance

Then did *Matavi* with right foot forward enter
And take a winning posture near the right pillar
While the veteran dancers ranged themselves opposite;
She danced two numbers quite apposite
To the songs sung in praise of the divine Lord,
And all the musical instruments sounded in concord.

The prologue sung in even tempo was followed close
By the main parts numbering four in sequence;
Matavi executed with grace and cadence
Her dance, bringing it to a fine close.

She performed next two other forms of dance
With such finesse that she seemed a golden creeper
Come to life, and her art an exemplar
Of the very grammar of dance.

King awards the highest title "Dancer Excelsior" to Matavi

The dance put the king into pure rapture;
And he awarded the title, "Dancer Excelsior,",
As also a prize of green necklace, worth it is said,
A thousand and eight pieces of gold.

Matavi encashes her new status

Doe-eyed Matavi assigned to her serving woman,
Old and hunch-backed, the task of seeking a leman
For her who, rich and infatuated, would purchase
The green necklace and the girl unparalleled
For the price of a thousand and eight pieces of gold.

When the woman announced this in the market place
It was young *Kovalan* who closed the deal with eagerness
And swiftly followed her to the home of the mistress
To claim possession of his purchase.

Kovalan buys Matavi

He lost himself in love for this charmer,
And in his new-found joy he had no thought
For his own devoted wife and his plighted troth.

Matavi is established as the greatest dancer

In the fair city of *Pukar, Matavi* of golden beauty
Made dance expositions of the five forms of poesy,
The four kinds of musical utterance,
The eleven kinds of music-based dance,
And the relevancy of artistic expression
To the principle of measure and calculation;
She won thereby an undying reputation.

Canto 4 - In Praise of Evening Twilight

The goddess of Earth wails

"My lord, the great and universal giver of light
With his brave chariot has left my sight!
And my darling son who paints the sky fair
With his cool beams is seen nowhere!,"
Wailed the sea-girt earth goddess,
With pallid face and tearful eyes;
Her whole body bedewed with fear
She sank in misery, sighing for her lover.

When a mighty king fights his enemy on the border,
His Loyal subjects are plundered by the petty raider,
And the disloyal ones win foreign favour.
When husbands are away on affairs public,
Their devoted wives get lovesick,
While the lucky ones in love do revel.

Evening descends

Shepherds play tuneful notes on oaten flutes,
The south wind robs the scent of flowers wild
Driving out the bees from every field,
And scatters sweetness all along its route;
Women of shining bangles light lamps pretty,
As evening descends on the city.

Young in years, but a puissant knight,
The *Pantiya* king traced his ancestry
To the moon, that gleams crescent at twilight;
His lustre banishes evening's dark memory;
Brighter than any star, the heavens he ruled,
And evenly cast his beams on the world.

Matavi and Kovalan

On a couch strewn with home-grown flowers,
Jasmine, november, and many others,
The lovers shone with loveliness;
As the string of corals above the thin dress
Beat against and tickled her mons veneris
Matavi filled *Kovalan* with joy rapturous;
Respite and renewal came in alternation,
Thus achieving orgasms of passion.

Woman in love

Incense from the West and myrrh from the East,
In whose fumes the women used to bathe their bodies,
Were now discarded as unseasonable;
Sandalwood brought from the southern hills
And ground into paste on circular slabs
Cut from northern hills was profusely
Smeared on their bosoms and arms;
Lotus flowers filled with pollen dust,
Buds of lotus, leafy shoots, tempting
Bluebells, and their red cousins
Were strung together into garlands which
The women wore round their necks,
Adorned besides with strings of large corals;

They and their dear spouses retired
To the couches on the open terrace where
Soft moonlight and the soothing southwind
Roused them to the pitch of passion, so they
Revelled in love's delights to the full,
And at last slid into the arms of slumber.

Lot of Kannaki

Gentle *Kannaki* was to misery a prey
Her wedded lord having gone astray;
Her body and mind lay in disarray:
Her dainty legs no anklets graced,
Her mons veneris no jewel grazed,
No sandal her suffering breasts stilled,

Nought but the sacred knot her neck encircled,
Her ears stood denuded of rings precious,
Her full fair face showed no strain of coitus,
Collyrium sparkled not her eyes as before,
Vermillion marked her coral forehead no more,
Her flowing hair lay in neglect sore.

Love-lorn woman suffer

The love-lorn women sighed like furnace,
And deserting the summer terrace,
Retired to stuffy apartments
With unopened casements;
Their breasts heavy and shapely
Rejected sandal with contumely;
No couch made of feather or flower
Could induce them to slumber;
The nose that had helped in bouderie days
Now snuffled without cease;
Rings no longer adorned the ears,
And the eyes that had crimsoned with passion
Now discharged a stream of tears;
Nightlong they suffered the pangs of separation.

God of Love rules

Her mincing steps like the swan's,
Like the lily's her fragrance,
Her honeyed mouth red like the lotus blossom,
Hair like the shining black loam,
Eyelids like the petals of bluebells;
This lady of the Lake awoke from slumber
To the music of the bees;
The booming call of woodland birds,
The shrill crowing of pied rooster
And the rousing sound of conch
Banished sleep from the city;
With the departing night, dawn slowly crept,
Grieving or rejoicing; nobody slept:
Who could resist the God of love
Roaming with flowery arrows
And long sugarcane bow?

Contrast between Matavi and Kannaki

Lilies and lovers bloom in moonlight,
When love is denied, the moon is a blight;
So *Matavi* weal and *Kannaki*'s woe;
Thus does the king deal with friend and foe.

Canto 5 - The Festival of *Indra*

Sunrise

Her apparel the curling sea,
Breasts the mountain peaks,
Garlands the coursing streams,
And tresses the rainclouds:
Thus the Earth goddess immense
Casts off the veil of darkness
As the sun rise up over the hills
And with his rays the whole world fills.

The City of Pukar — Maruvurpakkam

Stately homes with patios for lovers,
Art collections in the middle chambers,
And casements like the eyes of deer
Lined the approach to the city of *Pukar.*

Near the waterfront further interior
Had settled Greek sailors
Who by sea had commerce
Whose exotic ways were a local wonder.

Passing these were well laid-out streets
Where flowers, myrrh and incense,
Fragrant and cool unguents,
Pastes and powders of all kinds
Were for sale; Next came piles
Of silk, cotton and woollen goods,
Cakes and ale, fish and salt,
Meat and betel leaves, oils and utensils,
Woodwork and iron articles,
Paints, dolls, and statues in clay.
These in turn were followed by residences
Of diamond-setters, tailors, tanners,
Makers of musical instruments, singers,
And professional composers, domestic servants,
And manual labourers and generally
Working classes filled one half of the city.
First was the royal boulevard,
The street of temple-car with flag followed,
Next a street of shops intervened;
Then the road to rich merchant's homes;
The houses of priests, of beloved farmers,
Medical scholars, astrologers, and others,
Workers in precious stones, had their big houses.

Pattinap-pakkam

Two kinds of eulogists, frenzied men
Possessed by *Vetala,* as well as men
Who calculated time, public entertainers,

Courtesans, dancers, servants -- men and women,
Percussion artists, and other instrumental masters,
And clowns had their houses in separate streets;

Racing drivers, elephant mahouts,
Charioteers round the forts,
Those who lived in big residences -- all of them
Were filled with music in *Pattinappakkam.*

Market place

In the broad square, tree-lined,
At the city centre bazaars functioned,
Keeping noisy throughout day light
Like the sound of armies in fight.

Worship of Genie

There in April on full moon day women celebrants
Offered cakes, rice, flowers and incense
To the guardian genie that once saved the city
And the honour of the king with mighty lance
At *Indra's* behest, and this was followed
By frenzied *tunanku* and mellow *kuravai* dance
While others shouted, "May our land be hallowed
With happiness and no hunger, disease or enmity."

Soldiers offer sacrifice

To the altar of sacrifice marched the soldiers
In two groups from the city's far corners;
They carried catapults or lances, with hauteur,
And wore military medals made of leather;
Clapping on one another's shoulders
They raised a deafening sound like thunder,
Shouting, "Our glorious and victorious king."
And swore to propitiate the god of war.
In a trice they cut off their own heads,
And placed them on the sacrificial slab to the roar
Of martial drums from every direction.
For want, in the south, of fit adversaries,
The puissant *Tirumavalavan* led his armies
With drums and swords to the north:
None there was to face his might and wrath;
Vexed with the obstacle of the Himalayas
To his further advance, alas!
He had perforce to plant his standard
Bearing the figure of a leopard
On top of the holy mountain,
The home of sages divine.

The Wondrous hall of the city of Pukar

On his march home many a king paid tribute:
Vaccira, *Makata*, and *Avanti* -- all of great repute,
Of jewels that were heavenly rewards
For their aid in time past to the gods --
A plaque with pearls inset,

A gold and gem casket,
And a wondrous gold and diamond archway --
Treasures taken to the *cola* city for display.

The five genie

In the warehouse at the mouth of *Kaviri* lay
Bales and baggages heaped mountain high,
Bearing the names or symbols of either foreign
Or native owners, with no guards without or within;
Any attempt to steal was bound to fail,
So wakeful were the watching eyes of a genie.
The thief, if any, was made to carry the stolen bale
And run round the open space, tired and weary.

A sacred pond there was in which the blind,
The deaf, the maimed, and the diseased
Could take a dip and get cured.
In a shining pillar dwelt a powerful deity,
Who nullified the effect of snake poison
Or of black magic on every devotee
Who prayed to him with great passion.

A genius there was, associated with a square
That frightened to death false ascetics,
Secretly immoral women, disloyal courtiers,
Bigamists, false witnesses and scandalmongers.
Were any injustice or misrule to occur,
The statue of justice in feminine form,
That stands all by itself on a platform
Would shed tears, and no words utter.
The people in general offered sacrifices
At these five institutions for redresses.

Indra's flag pole taken in a procession

When the holy drum from *Vaccirakkōṭṭam*
Was paraded on a decorated elephant,
And God *Indra's* flagpole raised,
The festival of *Indra* commenced.

The idol of Intira

In a palanquin whose sides sparkled
With precious stones, and whose top
Shone with plates of beaten gold
The idol of *Indra* was in slow pace
Taken along the main streets of the city.

People welcome the deity

Impressive arches beautified by pearls
And emeralds welcomed the deity;
Besides, golden vases, elegant lamps,
Strings of gold beads, fans of soft white hair,
And incense added to the festive air.

The bathing of

The five main orders of the king's officers,

Indra's idol

The eight kinds of lesser ones,
Scions of the royal family, sons
Of merchants, the prancing cavalry,
Troops of elephants, and charioteers
Numerous—came marching bravely.
Spontaneous was the shout of the people,
"May our king ever wield his sceptre noble".
Kaviri shares responsibilities one thousand and eight,
And supports the world and all things in it;
The image of the god of gods was bathed
In *Kaviri's* holy water, brought in golden pots
Up pollen-spattered steps of the bank
To the awe of men and the delight of gods.

Festival of other gods

At the temples of eternal Lord *Civa*,
Of the beautiful six-faced *Muruka*
Of the white complexioned *Baladeva*
Of the blue-skinned *Tirumāl*,
And of *Indra* whose parasol
Was decked with strings of pearls,
Vedic rites by *Brahmans* prescribed
Were without a flaw observed.

To the four orders of heavenly spirits,
The eighteen kinds of aerial spirits,
And the numerous indigenous deities —
Were offered special ceremonies of worship.

Discourses in religious centres

Discourses on spiritual or ethical matters
Were given by wise men in all religious centres,
The Cola of noble chariot ordered

Prisoners Released

That the defeated and captured
Kings be given their emancipation
On this sacred occasion.

Celebration throughout the night

Folk players and dancers held the audience in thrall,
Bards and minstrels, fiddlers and flutists
Together with *Vina* artists and vocalists
With their music kept the people in constant thrill;
The whole night through the festive mood lasted.

Matavi of curved ear-rings lovely
Lazes in contentment after love's ecstasy;
So do jasmine, lotus, lilies and *mayilai*
All interwined in beauty lie;
Elephants relax from acme of desire,

The South wind wanders

The wind frolics in the sweet grove,
Wanders among the joyous flower-shops,

Listens to the sweet words of chaste maidens,
Companions the crooning bards, and like *Kovalan*
Who loves the company of bards and immoral women,
Seeks the music of the bees in this spring season;
And the Southwind sweeps along the streets.

Young men in wonderment

With dark clouds her burden,
Face free of tiny hare-like spots,
But with two painted black darts
And a *kumil* flower between,
Is she the moon come down
From the bright sky to wander
On earth, fearful of the serpent's ire?

The god of love was fed on nectar,
That flowed from the land of the moon,
From the vast sea of milk risen;
Fish mark was on his banner;
Could lightning, his child,
Come down to mundane world?

All the beautiful flowers like red cotton,
Lily, black hemp, *kumil* and jasmine
Bloomed in profusion in this city
Of the mighty monarch whose domain
Is smiled on by the goddess of plenty;
Is it the lotus then that roams amain
In search of its beloved mate?

This nymph, shy and so winsome,
Full of smiles, with voice like *vina* music,
Is she not the god of death fearsome
To inveigle men to their doom,
Though he has assumed feminine form,
Afraid to affront the king's justice?

When married men return home

Women votaries to the God of Love
Prevailed on the men to surrender to love
And left on their chests marks of love;
At home their chaste wives discovered
The marks of betrayal and their anger continued
Even after their guests had appeared.

"Is there not in the whole wide world
Any cure for the redness of her eyes
That once were bluer than blue lilies,
To save the situation thus unfurled?"
Such was the guilty thinking

Of the men who stood trembling.
Domestic storms arose such as these
During the public festivities.

Black eyes and Red eyes

In the purple water-lily does honey ooze,
Filling the inside with love juice;
The black eyes of *Kannaki* soaked in pain,
As her left eye filled with trepidation;
Red with pleasure were *Matavi's* eyne
As her right one trembled with expectation.

Canto 6 - Festival of Seabath

The festival of the God of love

A noble hero of *Vincai* city in the Silver Mountains
Sported in a flowery meadow with his lovely companion
Of darting eyes, long and dark; the sport ends;
Resting awhile, he thought of a new diversion.

The hero addresses his beloved

We go to the festival of *Indra* today
Beginning in a southern wealthy city;
When the *Avunar* launched a blitzkrieg on *Amaravati*
The tiger-hearted *Cola* king repulsed it successfully,
And when the king himself was attacked by the enemy

In the form of a black cloud, *Indra* sent a genie
Who saved the king and this genie still guards *Pukar*,
Accepting sacrifices, and we shall see it.

We shall also visit the five noble institutions,
The gift of the gods, and see the dance representations
Of famed *Matavi* of pubes like a cobra hood;
She takes her descent from *Urvaci*, the divine danseuse,
Who was born on earth under a sage's curse
For the sin of allowing her artistic concentration
To be shattered by her passion for *Jayantan*.

"My darling with tempting red lips
And waist as narrow as *tuti's*
We shall offer prayers to the god of gods!"

In the course of their journey southward

The lover showed his dear companion
The beauty of many-peaked Himalayas,
The broad fertile plains of the Ganges,
The fair city of *Uncai*, the forest of *Vindyas*,
And the land irrigated by the *Kaviri*.

They reach Pukar

They saw all the wonders of *Pukar*
And witnessed the festival of *Indra*

The eleven dances of Matavi

Matavi through song and dance offered prayers
To *Mayon*, to the four orders of spiritual choir,
And to the beneficent moon, skyey wanderer.

Civa's Kotukotti and *Pantaranka* dances,
She danced piling terror on terror to perfection,
Accompanied by music, descriptive of action.

Krishna's breaking the tusker sent to kill,
And *Vishnu's* wrestling with *Avunan* symbol of evil,
Were represented in dance with exquisite skill.

Handsome *Muruka's* victory over *Curan*
As also his dance of peace with parasol lowered,
Were by *Matavi* most effectively rendered.

The marvellous pot-dance of *Vishnu*,
And *Kaman's* dance to rescue his son
Were realistic in execution.

Durga's victory dance, *Lakshmi's* dance of love,
And *Indrani's* bracelet dance, so well done
That terpsichorean art touched its acme;
Was not *Matavi* descended from divine *Urvaci?*
The festival of *Indra* with its dances, decoration,
And pageants attracted visitors from heaven
Who came incognito and enjoyed freely;
Matavi's dance, ornament, and costume
Displeased *Kovalan*, but she knew how to manage him.

Matavi by her arts pleases Kovalan

Her black hair, redolent of ghee, gained in lustre
By being treated with an infusion of essence,
And perfume in herbal water; its moisture
Banished in fumes of incense.

Her tresses, parted five ways, were with musk laced,
Her toes were painted with red paste;
Signet rings encircled her tender fingers,
Anklets and tiny bells graced her ankles,
Her thighs were clasped round by *kurankuceri*
Over the garments she wore a girdle of pearls;

Coral chains adorned her shoulders,
Diamond bangles interspersed with nine gems
And minuscule conchs enclosed her arms;
The nape of her neck was hidden under
Gold knots and hooks of chains;
Ear-rings of diamonds and emeralds she wore,
Her locks of hair were decorated
With *toyyakam* and *pullakam* ornaments;
She practised the arts of reluctance and surrender
In love which whetted his appetite the better.

The full moon glowed over beach and grove,
Where odorous pine and laurel grew;
The fine spot large numbers drew,
And towards it *Kovalan* and *Matavi* drove.
In lotus pools bees hummed in pain at the tardy
Fowls to announce the break of day;
The sky glimmered with the morning star.

They set out for the seashore

Kovalan and *Matavi* set out for the seashore:
He, with garlands on his broad chest,
Rode on a mule, being generous as the rain,
While she on a chariot relaxed.

Multi-storied business houses could be seen
Bursting with merchandise worth a fortune;
And nearby, all along the street, serving maids
Lighted figured lamps and offered their prayers
With lawn grass, grain and flowers;
Their anklets jingled as they moved like tides;
And the goddess of wealth smiled on the scene.

Illuminations in the waterfront

Near the waterfront foreigners had settled,
And further on was the public grain market,
Displaying various goods with quality and price marked
Under the bright light of lamps, coloured liquid,
Sweetmeats, pastes and flowers were sold;
Also in lamplight metalworkers, confectioners,
And vendors of fish and liquor plied their trade
While the lighthouse illumined the seashore.

Light from boats, light from foreigners' nightlamps,
Light of the guardsmen of big stores -- all these
Lent an air of gaiety to the strand,
layered with fine powdery sand.

People enjoy themselves

Many a galley lay at anchor,
Unloading their merchandise on the harbour:
Produce of the sea and of the mountain.

In a nearby grove beaus and their women
Sported themselves with abandon,
A mood that prevailed all round at the festival,
That *Karikalvalavan* started in olden time,
And in *Pukar* the four castes indulged in revel,
Mirth and laughter being the sole aim.

Matavi and Kovalan

On the seashore a place was spotted
Under an alexandrian laurel,
Where the stench of fish was by the smell
Of pine flowers overcome; there a tent was fitted
Up for *Kovalan,* its sides embellished
By painted screens, its inside furnished
With an ivory-legged bedstead.
Relieving *Vacantamalai* of the vina
Matavi turned towards *Kovalan* and tended
The flame of love to a blazing incandescence.

Sunrise

The chariot of the sun appeared in the east,
And awoke the blue bees from their sleep
Inside the screwpine flowers,
As honey and pollen await their labours.

Canto 7 - Song of the Seaboard

The Setting

Trousseau of figured fabric, floral tattoos on stem,
Like a bride of large eyes, touched to perfection,
The priceless vina was a thing of beauty winsome;
Its stem, strings, screws, and head ideal in function.
Reverentially taking this instrument without peer,
She raised eight kinds of melody in character:
And removed every kind of imperfection,
Her petal-soft fingers agleam with emerald rings
Like humming bees softly kissed the strings;
She attuned the vina to her full satisfaction
By syncopation, contrasts, trills, combinations,
Tone distillations, glissandos, modes, and intonations.

In praise of Kaviri

Radiant as the full moon is the Cola's orb royal,
Though he with the Ganges does mate,
Thou *Kaviri* withholdeth not favours spousal,
Thou art indeed faithful and chaste;
Hail to thee, *Kaviri!*

Fair sceptred and garlanded with fame,
Thy lord is spurred to mate with the maid;
Yet thy loving heart doth not upbraid,
High-born Chastity or *Kumari* is thy name;
Hail to thee, *Kaviri!*
Thou glideth in peaceful rejoicing
Amid pastoral sounds of gushing
Gurgling water, of flood bathing,
Of the ploughman's cheering,
The mirth of crowds in festivals,
And clangour of arms in castles;
These signs of work and joy ring
The glorious rule of the *Cola* king.

Kovalan sings in praise of Pukar

This our mistress of long dark eyes
Doth wither, betrayed by the base lover,
Who by *Varuna*, the sea-god, swore troth;
How could we know he lacked honour?

The water-lily unfolds its petals
Mistaking the white conch with spirals
For the shining moon, and the corals
For stars: that is our city of *Pukar*!

He shadowed me to the grove
Offered presents begging for love;
Now I am beggar'd in his absence:
How could we guess his pretence?
Seeing the moon's image on water
The blues their petals uncover;
And maidens' dark blue eyes
Perplex the bees as they cannot tell
Apart the flowers from the eyes:
Such is our city of *Pukar*!
Washed ashore by the tide
Up the beach the conchs ride
Pushing the houses of sand away
Kneaded into shape by girls at play
Who hurl their flowers in mock hate
To break the intruder's pate;
Like so many eyes do they appear
That passers-by in wonder stare;
Such is our city of *Pukar*!

The maiden ripe for love

The inward-coiled conches upward scamper,
Leaving a ribbed pattern on the shores;
The laurels shed their pollen-laden flower
Filling to the brim the furrows;
This inhospitable coast rears
A moon-faced maiden of beauty rare,
Whose dace-like eyes my heart did pierce,
And set it afever with desire,
For which there is no known cure
Save what her soft breasts can provide.

Dangerous Ignorance

Flowers in hand stands a fair caitiff
In guard over the drying fleshy fish;
Never thought I a seductive nymph
Amid this barren region would flourish;
Had I but known the perils of this grove
Ne'er would I have within its purlieus roved.

In the drying yard of the fishers
A female figure haunts, waving flowers,
And her long eyes change to daggers
That most cruelly slay the beholders;
Had I guessed this dire danger
I would venture not for any wager.

The lover addresses the maiden

Her eyes are dace, arched brows *Kaman's* bows,
Dark nimbuses her flowing locks,
On her face *Kama* his cunning endows;
With love's fever my heart rocks:
Is she the moon-goddess as a human sent
To hide here from the devouring serpent?

The wailing of conches thrown ashore terrifies
The maiden with spear-sharp, red-lined eyes;
Yet to me they are ruthless, ruthless as death:
Is this dread fishermaid an *avatar* of Death?

The fair watcher, to me, is a spectre dire
Come to this wood of *atumpu* flowers
With demure looks and flowing hair
To drive me insane with desire.

The lover's complaint

Fragrance of the vale, sandy beach odorous,
Honeyed words, breasts of virginal fulness,
Face fair as the full moon, brows like bows twain,
Waist like streak of light; for me endless pain.
Encurled hair with fragrance innate,
A pair of eyes restless as darting dace,
Teeth like tender buds, her lone state,
My peace and freedom surely efface.

Seashore breeding shellfish evermore,
Scented copse with trees in flower,
A lone maiden in her own bower,
Teeth like tender shoots in a row,
Face a shining moon, and twinned
Breasts torment me without end.

Appeal to the reluctant maid

Fishing in the sea, your elders are killers,
You too steal into me and drain my breath;
Your breasts surge with elemental powers,
And press the poor waist out of its breath.

With savage-eyed net your father despoils life,
You too with long avenging eyes destroy life;
Look, your waist bending like a streak
Under the coral-loaded bosom may break.

Your brothers go forth to kill in swift boats
Like them you too kill with your cruel brows;
As your heavy breasts strain the sustention
Of the wasp waist, have you not any pity?

The lover reminisces

With rubied pestle does she polish corals
Red eyes has she who polishes corals,
Red, red eyes she has who polishes corals
They aren't poppies, but death's portals!

Graceful as the swan she walks
Under the laurels one may mark
Peacock-walk the red eyes walk
They are dreaded Death's head!

Holding liquor-gushing blue flowers
She scares birds from drying fish;
Her eyes are not white spears,
But are far more fierce!

You, innocent swan, follow her not!
Your way is not hers, though her steps
Are like yours; follow her not!
The sea-girt globe loses its liberty
And is bond-slave to her beauty:
Follow her not, fair swan, in her steps!

Prelude to Counterpoint

Misgivings preyed on *Matavi's* mind,
Whose doe-like eyes were pained;
"Has some past love revived in him?"
"Am I no more than a passing whim?"
And in pique she sang in counterpoint,

Voice and emotion artfully combined;
The fingers responded, the strings danced;
Varuna, the sea-god, listened entranced:
Her plaintive songs were a cry poignant
As if an old love was still regnant.

Matavi sings in praise of Kaviri

Lapped in bee-haunted flowery shores,
With dark pisceform eyes clear;
Thou moveth with grace that but shows
Faith in thy lord's unbending sceptre;
Hail to thee, *Kaviri* !

As flowers bloomed in profusion,
Peacocks danced with plume unfurled,
Kuyil birds fluted in unison,
Garlands on exulting breasts whirled,
And thou glided in ease joyful,
Thy lord's might made it possible.
Hail to thee, *Kaviri* !

With maternal love and care thou fostereth
The land of thy lord without respite;
This enduring service thou rendereth
By the grace of him whose rule is upright.
Hail to thee, *Kaviri* !

The lover initiated in the traditions of Pukar

Bright as moonrays is the face of my mistress,
Her teeth are fairer far than your pearls;
Are you the god of love come to impress
And win her heart with a gift of pearls?
Even our sea many such gifts offers
In exchange for wreaths of flowers;
Such is our city of *Pukar*!

Fishergirls their love-lorn plight betray
As their bracelets slip from wasted arms,
And waterlilies their innocence betray
As they disclose their nidden charms,
Seeing swan plumes amid laurel flowers,
Taking them for the moon and starry showers;
Such is our city of *Pukar*!

Here where inebriety is men's weakness,
Women are prone to love sickness;
Innocent girls have eyes like spears,
And when waves erase their houses
Of sand, their eyes stain with tears,
And their hands try to drain the sea;
Such is our city of *Pukar*!

The handmaid informs her mistress of the lover's craving

Watching the spotted crabs mate and gambol
The youth a meaningful look cast at me
In this flower-filled coastal dingle;
Overture unresponded to,he left me;
My dear fledgling with curly hair,
Of his true intent I am unaware.

After the joys of love come the pangs of separation

Forsaking me, has he also forgot
Charity, himself, and the chariot?
O, let him! you coast-loving flowers
And swans, our mind ever remembers.

In this desire-charged evening
When my eyes weep with suffering,
You, nectar-mouthed flowers,
Sleep unconcerned! in your slumbers
Do you see my lover in the grove?
Will you tell him how I grieve?
My lover rode away in his chariot with the fleetness
Of bird-flight, and the waves erased the impress
Of the chariot-wheels: What then shall I do?
If you too are like him, what shall I do?

The sounding sea, the mating swans, the grove in flower,
And the cool seashore -- sharers of my former happiness,
Won't one of you for old times' sake tell my lover
How unkind it is to leave me thus in loneliness?

O you sounding sea, he who was in our fellowship
Departed, and you removed the last memento;
May you be happy! our former friendship
Forgotten, you by this act have become my foe;
May you be happy!

If mother knows

With pearls and rubies in your marrow
Your flood fosters the brown swales;
The god of love with flower-decked arrow
Wounded my heart, and my loveliness pales;
When my mother agonises over it
What answer could I give?
Opening your ruby lips, lord of the foam,
Laughing your pearly laughter,
The fishermen's drying yard you roam;
When my aspect pales to the colour
Of pumpkin blossom, and my mother
Asks, in the name of the Almighty,
Who has been my base betrayer,
How could I speak in perplexity?

The handmaid in a quandary

O lord of the sea who ordains
Inroads into the coastal region,
Disperses floral sweet fragrance,
And drowns the smell of carrion,
Dost thou not see the maiden
Waste away for her absent fellow?
Where shall I hide my burden
When her mother's questions follow?

The discon-solate maiden

Tender is the night, and the sun
Has sunk below the horizon;
My eyes have shed scalding tears,
Friend of friends, with blown flowers
On your hair, tell me if these harms
Of the blood-red evening, that slither
My bracelets from wasted arms,
Are also felt in the land of my lover?
Darkness spreads, and the day is in his grave,
My eyes have poured despondent tears;
You wise friend, is this dusky knave
Known in the land of my deserter's?

Light has faded, and no bird sings,
Irrepressible desire hot tears wrings;
Tell us, friend, does this tormentor
Darken in the land of my forsaker?

Through pinewoods and marsh he came,
Taught us to outgrow our childish game,
And departed like a conqueror;
We are impoverished for ever.

We won't forget

Coming through the marshes to this glen,
He begged, "Bless me with your favour,"
"Only bless me," cried he; will such a one
Ever forget me and my cervine surrender?

Seeing the swan and his mate at play,
Longing he stood only yesterday,
Gazing long he stood yesterday;
Like the golden marks of love on my body
He is part of me, and will not desert me.
Roost not, O crane, roost not in my coast,
Roost not, O crane, roost not in my coast,
Tell my lord I'm sunk in grief utmost,
Roost not, O crane, roost not in my coast.

Tender as young shoots her fingers
Plucked the strings to another melody,
Voice and words suiting the threnody

Though the old burden lingers.

Singing of fishers' love-lorn condition
Consoled me; you robbed me of consolation,
And made me sing of the joys of passion;
Cruel Evening, rob me also of life and motion.

The words of love rise to consciousness,
While singing in sorrow and loneliness;
Unkind evening, why do you torture me?
We are like the famished defenders
Of a besieged fortress; what sympathy
Can you have for the besiegers?

Pangs of love deepen, and set is the sun,
And the earth slumbers; dizzy evening!
If it's true you are you, and he the one
That has parted, poor is the world, Evening!
In our lovers we wholly did believe,
And their honeyed words we avidly drank,
Not knowing we would have to grieve;
You god of the sea with scented bank
Pray forgive their break of troth,
Visit them not with you wrath.

Kovalan parts from Matavi

Listening to her songs about an absent lover,
Kovalan's mind fell a prey to the monster:
"Is she not an accomplished dissembler,
A courtesan, and a subtle trickster?
A beauteous fiend, but a pestilence."
In bitterness he let go her hand;
Inexorable Fate, who can stand?
He departed in a storm with his train.
He left her in the pollen-flying oasis,
The loud plaints of handmaids cease;
Benumbed in heart, she climbed the chaise
And reached home alone, mind in a maze.
Peace and order reigned in the outer world
Governed by the mighty *Cola* king
Whose subjects abided by his emblems
Of the royal elephant and the shining sword.

Canto 8 - On Spring

Spring, the season of love-making

"The hills of *Vishnu* and the sea of *Kumari*
Bound the rain-rich Tamil country
Of towered *Maturai*, famed *Uraiyur*,
Bustling *Vanci* and *Pukar* on sea;
These God *Maran* holds in fealty,
Spring, his companion, radiates allure."
Thus chimed Southwind, serving the will
Of the great sage of *Potiyil* hill;
The trilling of *Kuyil* in the leafy dell
Issues to all votaries a clear call
To muster in finery for love's carnival.

Love-lorn Matavi

In the coastal grove redolent of flowers
Kovalan's dalliance proved all too brief
As he in jealousy left her to loneliness and grief;
In *Matavi's* bluebell eyes new longing glitters,
She ascends to the high summer pavilion
Her *kumkum* marked breasts heavy with passion;
Anoints the high domes with sandal paste,
And wears on her throbbing bosom pearls chaste,
Soothing in haste her rising heart
Seeming calm, she takes the vina well-wrought
And softly sings songs of pleasure;

Plays on the Vina

The mood deserts, and she is distraught,
And chooses among nine the best posture.
Round the bridge her right hand winds,
And with her left the control she minds.
She finds out how best to preclude blemishes
Of dissonance, imprecision, harshness
And wolf in the *Vina* of fourteen strings.
To various tunes from *ulai* to *kaikkilai*;
The *vina* proved a perfect ally.
Each string in sympathy dances
To the singer's voice nuances.
As she plays and in exuberance sings
In all four modes, old memory stings,
And her joyous mood escapes on wings.

The God of love is all powerful

Kaman with his flowery arrows subdued
All nature, and has become the world's sovereign;
With regenerative force *Matavi* gets endued,
And hopes to win back stubborn *Kovalan*
By sending an appeal to bend to nature's might;
Her garland of golden champak, jasmine white,
Fragrant roots, red lilly, green creepers,
And dark buds is a medley of smells and colours;

Matavi indites a love letter

A long white screwpine petal she selected
And wrote thereon what her heart dictated,
Putting the point of a jasmine bud to use,
Dipped in crimson flower juice.
"The Prince of Spring presides over the joyous mating
Of every sentient being;
And the moon is no better, aggravating
The pain of loneliness revived at nightfall;
When lovers cease from union, satiate,
And when parted ones remain obdurate,
Kaman's flower-decked arrows pierce them fatally;
Knowing this, come and save me."
All the sixtyfour arts together deserted her,
And like a prattling child she spoke
Under one over-mastering desire;
Her whole being dissolved in weakness.
She beckoned her maid *Vacantamalai*

Sends it to Kovalan

And said, "Take this to *Kovalan*, tell him
The truth of this letter, woven into a garland,
And escort him here tenderly."
The maid whose long eyes were streaked blood-red
Met *Kovalan* at the marketplace, tendering the letter.
Refusing it, he spoke bitter words about her:

Kovalan's response

"First I set my eyes on her, she danced
The ecstasy of love, tilak mark on forehead,
Luxuriant hair, brows curved like bows,
Eyes like bluebells, nose like *Kumil*
Mouth a red cherry -- a face to conjure with.

Scene changes: her face like the moonlight
Was heavy with the dark cloud of hair;
Darting eyes pricking desire,
Nectarine ruby lips shaping a coral smile,
She assented to my yea and nay
Acting a magnificent part.

Erotically aroused at the onset of twilight
And hungering for the food of love,
Repeating words like a parrot,
Mincing her steps like a swan,
Flaunting her splendour like a peacock,
And putting on the modesty of a maid,
With long piercing eyes, she gave herself
Wholly to me in a hidden bower;
I have seen through this guise also.

Her anklets ringing musical notes,
Jewels jostling merrily,

Ornaments burdening her slender waist,
With love gleaming in her eyes,
Wilfully twisting my words of annoyance
At her withdrawal from union,
She stood behind me as if cloyed with mating,
And with her lovely hair floating, moved away.
That playacting also I witnessed.

When I lived apart, she seemed all at sea,
And to my kith and kin bewailed her lot;
That consummate deceit I could see.
Adorning her hair with dew-fresh flowers
Swarmed by bees, swooning at twilight
She bemoaned her separation from me;
That realistic acting also I saw.

I had heard of her frequent fainting
Before all and sundry; An actress she is
By profession, my dear maid,
Her ways are perfectly in character."

The maid reports to Matavi

Her gold pendants nodding she listened
In pain, knowing her mission had failed;
Sore at heart, back she sailed
To her mistress, a flower in bloom.

The maid reports

"Fair maid made fairer by ornaments,
Though he has turned down the appeal now
And is not inclined to come at the moment,
We shall surely see him here by break of day."

Matavi pines for love

Hurt beyond words, *Matavi* lay reclined
On the flower-strewn *divan* that hurt;
Not a wink of her long, flower-like eyes
Had she, and sighed the endless night through.

The red lotuses opened their petals wide,
Sweet mango-trees put forth tender leaves,
Pretty acoka-trees unfolded their blossoms;
Spring was all round with a riot of blooms;
Only *Matavi* of sharp spear-like eyes
Lay wilted, blasted by *Kovalan's* cruelty.

The song of the Kuyil

"You who have turned away from your lovers,
Hearken to the invisible god of love!
Sulk not, but rejoice in the embrace of the loved!"
Thus the *kuyil* birds sang.

"You parted from *Matavi* of lotus face
After the song of the seaboard had ended;

You were till then united with her wholly,
Go to her". The *Kuyil* song in essence said.

Canto 9 - The Fateful Dream

With night's onset every home is aglitter
With rice grains and full-blown jasmine
Strewn on the spacious interior;
Ornamental lamps brightly shine,
Women put on garments light
And preen themselves for love's delight.

The story of Malati

Tradition has it that virtuous *Malati* once
Found herself in dire predicament
When her foster child, feeding at her breast,
Died of suffocation;
She dared not face the parents' accusation
As nothing would convince them of her innocence.

With the child in her arms she prayed at the temples
Of *Karpakam*, *Murukan*, *Balaraman*, the Sun,
Civa, *Indra*, and *Catavakanan*
Arukan, and the Moon in succession.
But she in vain broke her heart's cockles.
At last she fell prostrate before *Pacanta Cāttan*
And lo! a female fiend of exceeding beauty,
Itakini by name, appeared before her and spoke,
"Blameless one, the gods do not save
One that has not earned heavenly goods;
I speak true, therefore give me the child."
So saying the fiend snatched away the child,
Went to a cemetery and consumed the body.
Like a peacock struck by lightning
She wept inconsolably, at which the god
Spoke, "Mother, do not weep, see before you the living child.
God himself became a child and lay at the foot
Of a tree on a *Kuyil*-haunted grove.
She went there and without hesitation
Took the miraculous child, held it to her bosom,

And went home to restore it to its mother.

This godly child grew to manhood and wisdom,
And after his parents died, won a legal battle
Against his cousins, and paid his debt
To his father and mother;
In time he married *Tevanti*
And one day he said: "I am bound on a pilgrimage,
Let your eyes, softer than flowers,
Bear with my absence," and revealing
To her his immortal presence, continued,
"Later you may come to me in my temple"
And departed from her side.
Pure of heart, she prayed to *Pacanta Cattan*
For reunion with her lord at the very place
After his pilgrimage.

Tevanti consoles Kannaki

Getting foreknowledge of the pangs of separation
To be felt by the virtuous and pure *Kannaki*,
Tevanti was filled with sympathy;
And she repaired to *Kannaki's* mansion
Where she sprinkled delicate grass and tiny paddy.
Finally blessing *Kannaki* to be happy
In reunion with her husband.

Kannaki's dream

"Never again shall I be united with my lord,
Says my instinct; Yesternight he came in my dream
And touching my hand said, *Follow Me*.
Leaving our home we entered a city
Where the people spoke words with the sting
Of a scorpion that *Kovalan* had come to great harm.
On hearing this I approached the king
And laying bare the truth sought justice.
The king and his people suffered at my hands
Which made me speechless, lady of flawless bangles!
Thus a curse fell on us, I too was a victim;
On reunion with my guiltless husband
The dream persisted; when you hear this
You will laugh at it," said *Kannaki*.

Tevanti suggests a remedy

"Lady of golden waist! steadfast in wifely love,
For once in last life you angered the God of love,
Which error may be undone now
By a sacred dip in *Soma* and *Surya*, tanks holy,
Situate near his temple on the banks of *Kaviri*.
At the confluence of the river and the sea,
And in this life and the next be blessed;
Let us hasten to do his behest."

"That does not become me," *Kannaki* averred.

"It is Lord *Kovalan* who is coming to us,"
Said the servant-maid; *Kovalan* straight entered
Kannaki's boudoir, and seeing the piteous
And sorrowful face, spoke to her in repentance:

Kovalan comes at last to his wife in a repentant mood

"Consorting with one who is all dishonesty
And evil, I have sqandered all the substance
Of our patrimony, and now in dire poverty
I am ashamed to come and meet you."

Aglow with joy, *Kannaki* in good cheer
Offered him her last treasure,
The anklets, to buy him pleasure.

Kannaki offers his hope

"Beloved one! With these anklets as capital
I shall restore our fortune in *Maturai;*
Dear wife, come with me." To hear was to obey.
And they left ere Dawn threw his mantle.

Chaste *Kannaki's* bad dream did obliterate
Dark-eyed *Matavi's* hope, as in the darkened
Night *Kovalan* was drawn by Fate
Inexorably to the course preordained.

Canto 10 - Journey Across the Country

Kovalan and Kannaki leave their home

Ere break of dawn, on a starry night
With the moon down, and the earth in darkness dight
Kovalan took a fateful decision and departed
With his wife from home, crossing the ornamented
Portals on whose doors were carved
Figures of sheep, swan and deer.

Prayers at various temples

They prayed at the temple of *Vishnu* of blue complexion,
Who on serpent coils was in yogic contemplation;
They passed on to the seven halls created by *Indra*
Where heavenly beings discoursed on the sermons
First preached under the *bodhi* tree by the Buddha,
And paid their humble obeisance.

They pray at

Holy Jain monks who had renounced meat,

the Jain temple

Desire envy, and the five senses had their meet
At their temple along with householders
Keeping religious vows to offer prayers
To the aerial spirits visiting the sacred place
On car festival and ablution days;
Kovalan and *Kannaki* offered their devotion
To the indwelling divinity and passed on.

The lofty city-gate set in high walls, and the people
Passing through looked like a mighty river clearing
The way through a mountain gorge; the couple
Easily did merge with the crowd leaving.
Along the broad banks of *Kaviri* lay hidden
Bathing ghats in the midst of coppices;
Kovalan and *Kannāki* passed these
And walked in the western direction.

Reach Kavunti's monastery

Past a grove to the north of fertile *Kaviri*
They trudged a mile, and entered a bower
Near the monastery of Sage *Kavunti*
Her tender waist and feet in pain severe,
And lisping like a child, weary *Kannaki*
Wondered how far thence was *Maturai* city.

Maturai is but a five into six *Katams* from home
Kovalan said smilingly to give her some hope;
And with her did *Kovalan* visit the monastery
Where they paid reverential respects to *Kavunti*
"Beautiful, high-born, virtuous and truly religious,
What may be your reason for being guilt-concious
And to flee from home?" asked the pious lady

Kavunti accompanies the couple to Maturai

"Though answer I have none, I tell you this:
To make a fortune in *Maturai* is my only wish."
"If so, her feet cannot stand the rough journey;
And unwise it is to expose her to the jeopardy
Of country tracts and forest tracts; but then
Who knows what makes her so stubborn?
I'm going to *Maturai* to learn the truth of existence
From the wise words of the great ones;
Go with me," she said in all graciousness.
"If you are pleased to be our guide,
Anxieties about my wife I cast aside."

Look, *Kovalan!* The journey on foot is long and hard,
As your wife and companion is frail and diffident;
The sun's heat can be avoided by taking the shady path

The land terrain and the difficulties

Of green woodlands which otherwise is inconvenient;
Pits and potholes abound, hidden by champak flowers,
The holes themselves were made to get at edible roots;

of the travellers

Minding the ground, our heads get hit by jackfruits,
Whose seeds, when stepped on, make us croppers.

The grassland route has other depressing features,
Which might make your timid wife tremble with fears,
As when otters in pools that carry scent of flowers

Kavunti guides them

Capture in their mouths long-bodied *valai* fish;
Or when the captive fish slips out among carps in skirmish,
Or when eels slither swiftly away inside the water;
When beehives in sugarcane plants split asunder
And honey flows down and mixes with pure water,
She would be tempted to drink, forgetting it is a sin,
With open palms curved to form a basin.
Weeders in the fields pluck the intruders
Including water cresses, and throw them
On the bunds, and inside the flowers
The bees, with spots and stripes on them,
Drowse, drunk with honey; let them not
Be trampled on by you without thought.
Dark curly-haired one, there will be seen
Only fields and groves everywhere;
If you harm the poor creatures, the sin
Will be more than you can bear.

A blameless bowl in one hand, a bag on the shoulder,
Blessed *Kavunti* carrying a fan of peacock feather
Started on her journey after a prayer
To the Word made God, followed by the loving pair.

Let Saturn burn with fury, comets be seen,
Or Venus southward tumble;

The scenes they see on the way

At the wind-tossed top of *Kutaku* mountain
Dark rainclouds gather, and thunders rumble,
And *Kaviri* is enriched with freshwater
That sweeps down forest manure to batter
At the base of *Pukar*, overleaping the dams
In the midst of a huge din that couples
With lesser noises of waterlocks, of buckets,
Of rustle of palms and of creaking lifts.

Ponds lush with lotus lie in between
Fields of rice and sugarcane;
And waterfowls like the red-footed crane,
The green-legged goose , the downy swan
Rails, ducks, herons and coots
Haunt these water-logged spots;
And their variously pitched sounds appear
As if a battle is being fought there.
Red-eyed buffaloes, wallowing in soft mud
Scrape their hairy unclean backs
On the ripening paddy spikes
Leaving many an unwanted dud.

Rural scenes — women workers

Sifting the seedlings from the flowering weeds
The women workers planted them in the fields;
Then they stood up strong and comely
Though their arms and shoulders were muddy;
And their long red eyes like carps flitted.
They gave themselves up to strong liquor,
Singing songs composed then and there
In their rich dialectal fare.

Yeomen at work

Proud yeomen worshipped God fashioned
Like their plows which with garland
Of waterlilies, *aruku* grass and paddy
They decorated; and sang songs in their glory
Standing by their plows in a posture
Of preparedness to plow the land entire.

Singing of the peasants

The proud peasants sing in elation
Having great faith in their occupation:
Their god is the god of the plow
Which they garland with lily,
Aruku grass and bunches of paddy;
In this season of much affluence
Even the drummers and the musicians
Play on merrily sounding soft and loud
In sheer artistic indulgence.

Brahmin's settlement

Songs and sounds of mirth over the river
Reached the travellers filling them with ardour;
In a sorrow-free mood they saw stately homes
Of brahmins enveloped in fragrant fumes
That rose up from the altar of fire worship,
Like the mist hovering over mountain-top.

Landed gentry

Further on palatial homes of the landed gentry
Loomed like a vast mountain-range against the sky;
The trio proceeded slowly to *Maturai*, covering hardly
Ten miles a day, learning meanwhile that the hardy
Civilisation rested on the life of happy
Farmers who shared their prosperity with the country.

At *Tiruvarankam*, that overshadowed the river
On the other side, was a fragrant spot in a grove
Of curved bamboo, and Jain sages thither
Came flying from *Pukar* to teach and guide
The faithful in the three truths of *the guru*
By which they themselves did abide.
"To see them is to be cleansed of all sins."
Of this faith were *Kovalan* and *Kavunti*

The Jain sages address the travellers

Who fell prostrate before the sages godly
The chief sage spoke not about their future
As he knew what and why they had to endure,
But said, "Virtuous *Kavunti*, look at what we do;
What we sow we reap tenfold; none can undo.

"Like the flame lit in the windy plain
Life is put out except for those who are with God,
Who is omniscient, beyond the reach of knowledge,
Universal saviour, personification of purity,
Of unruffled nature, unique, noble divinity,
Master of eight kinds of action, follower
Of *dharma*, my *guru*, my god."

The listeners heard this utterance
With folded hands raised over their heads,
And vowed never to stray from the truths,
And never to let anything enter their minds
Except the One who is eternal.
On finding such utter devotion, the sages
Levitated from the ground and blessed
Kavunti with cessation of future births.
After the sages had left, the two devotees
Promised to banish desire from their minds.

Insult to the lovers

Later they crossed the broad *Kaviri* by country craft,
And chose a convenient corner in a grove for rest;
There a libertine and his paramour slow paced,
And in close embrace, saw the young couple in slumber,
And wondered if they were *Kaman* and his partner.
They spoke to *Kavunti*: "You who have, by prayer
And fasting, starved your body, tell us who these are."
She in good faith answered: "They are my children."
At which the man, mischief bent, asked in scorn,
"Do brother and sister become lovers, wise one?."

Kavunti's Curse

At these profane words, *Kannaki* closed her ears
And stood before her husband trembling and in tears;
Kavunti, angry that *Kannaki* had been reviled,
Uttered a curse and changed them into jackals wild;
When they howled, *Kovalan* and *Kannaki* were startled.

The lovers plead for remission

In pity for the foul-tongued they begged pardon
Of the sage friend, who relented and gave remission
Saying that a year hence they would regain
Their shapes and till then inhabit a thorny wood.

They enter Uraiyur

Kavunti and her proteges then entered *Uraiyur*,
Which was also called *Varanam* since of yore
A fowl defeated an elephant;
(*Varanam* also means fowl and an elephant.)

In praise of the Cola King

Of the three crowned heads,
The *Colas* wearing heroic bracelets
Excelled in war, justice, and administration:
Qualities of their ancient tradition.

The celebrated festivals in the country
Attracting even heavenly denizens,
The unalloyed happiness of the citizens,
Harvests in abundance, the holiness of *Kaviri*,
The unfailing rains, eleven kinds of dance,
Songs of eight varieties, then the well-kept art
Were a testimony to their uniqueness.

Pukar the Capital praised

The sea-girt earth shines in the fame of *Pukar*
As the sun grows from bud to blossom in daytime
To merge with evening with moon's splendour;
Let both prosper upto the end of time!

BOOK OF MATURAI

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Canto 11 - Through a Wild Region

At the shrine overhung with flowers
The travellers offered devout prayers
To the All-Knowing Deity whose brilliance
Equalled that of the sun's.

Kavunti retold the great truths
The Jain angels had unfolded
In holy *Tiruvarankam* at the copse,
That lies between two rivers, islanded.

The trio then to the woodland dell retired,
A dell the wandering monks favoured;
And ere daybreak started on their tour
Southwards, crossing at sunrise *Uraiyur*
Green fields they passed and pools flowery;
And while they rested in a garden shady,
They saw an aged brahmin hymning
The praises of his patron king.

They meet Mankatu Maraiyon

Long live my king, my generous liege,
To protect the world from age to age;
Over all southern kings he gained victory,
And at the sea he hurled his spear
Which rose and engulfed in its fury
The land of *Kumari* hills, and *Pakruli* river.
Turning north he marched upto the Ganges
And the Himalayas, ever victorious;
May his life be long and glorious!
Long live *Pantiyan* who wore on his chest lofty,
The garland of Lord *Indra* of a thousand eyes,
To the greater glory of the lunar dynasty!

Kovalan asked him out of lively curiousity
His name and the reason for his arduous journey;

Kovalan's enquiry — The Reply

The learned brahmin answered patiently:
My heart's desire it was to see God *Vishnu* recumbent,
With his consort nestling to his divine chest,
On the coils of the thousand-headed serpent
Like blue clouds resting on the golden crest
Of mountains, at *Tiruvarankam* temple
Encircled by the waters of river *Kaviri*
On whose surface wavelets rise perpetually;
And devotees countless stand in a dazzle.

I longed to have a vision of Lord *Vishnu*
A top *Tiruvenkatam* hills, between the sun
And the moon, of complexion blue,
Burning bright as lightning, poised for action,
Holding in his lotus hands the terrible weapon
Of *Cakra* and the white conch, used as horn,
Wearing a beautiful garland, and golden
Clothes, but eyes coloured crimson.

"I hail from the village of *Mankatu*.
Lying at the foot of *Kutaku* hill;
Holding the *Pantiya* king in high regard
I praise him to my heart's fill."

Kovalan enquires again

"First among men, who to vedic rules comply,
Tell me kindly the best route to *Maturai*,"
This was *Mankatu* brahmin's reply to it:
The land that is riven by dissension
Between the king and his ministers
Falls into chaos; and here the sun,

The way to Maturai

As sovereign, disregards his ministers,
That are the seasons; every field and farm
Turn into desert, causing untold harm
To all who abide in or pass through it.

Rocks and hills you cross, and beyond this
Lie the mirages of the desert; going further,
You come to what looks like God's trident --
A crossways leading to two important places,
Katumpai and *Netunkulam*; if you take the dexter
Path, you will see the cedar tree impotent,
Dead omai, dry bamboo, hollow-footed siris,
Thirsty deer, huts of Eyinars, and cactus.

From there you could see *Pantiya* kingdom,
Where wild paddy, knotted sugarcane,
Ripe millet, arecanut, and plantain,

Of Cirumalai

Low-hanging coconuts, mango and jack fruit
Follow in succession; going on straight
You reach Maturai; along the path to the left
Lie fields, copses, and pools that are bee-haunted.

"Passing through a forest, you come upon a hill,
Sacred to *Vishnu*: under it you see a path,
That gives you an intellect without parallel;
Farther away three magical pools you meet with;
A bath in the first gives you knowledge of *'Aintiram'*
In the second, knowledge of former birth;
In the third, realisation of one's ideals.
To enter the passage, one prays to God piously,
And then come round the hill thrice devoutly.
Once inside, you see a gorge precipitous
With river *Cilampu* flowing below swiftly;
On its banks at the foot of a hopea tree
Amid fallen flowers, a nymph comes
Like a golden liana with hair dark as a cloud;
She wears jewels that are curved.
She will ask three questions: what is
The greatest ecstasy in this world? what is
Eternal? What is common to both worlds, and is
Calm and peaceful? Introducing herself as *Varotamai*
Living at the foot of the mountain, she vows
To serve you for ever if you reply
Correctly to all her questions, and lets you in;
You pass through many doors upto a stage,
Beyond this, another nymph like a flowering creeper
Comes and promises to satisfy all your wishes,
If you tell her what gives endless rapture.

If you fail in this test, she doesn't rage,
But quietly takes you outside the premises;
If you give right answers to her questions,
She shows you all the three pools, and returns.
According to the sacred books, if you inwardly chant
The five-letter and eight-letter *mantras*,
And bathe in one of the pools it will enchant

You as to forget the other two as useless extras;
If you contemplate the grace of *Vishnu*,
The temple mast with *Garuda* figure will be seen by you:
All your inherited sins will be obliterate,
And you proceed to *Maturai* in a blessed state.
These are the virtues of the sacred pools.

If you choose not that way, follow the middle;
Villages, rich with honey-bearing flowers
Dot the path, and by walking for many days

You meet a spirit dwelling in the forest
That comes in the garb desirable to behold
And stops you without using force;
If you pass beyond, you will see the main road
To *Maturai*; I wish you a happy journey.
I'm bent towards *Tiruvenkatam* and its lord
Whose feet I long to see and pray."

Kannaki replies to the Mankatu brahmin

Revered *Kavunti* spoke wisely to the brahmin
After listening to the detailed instruction:
"You who love vedic virtues and principles,
We don't need the things conferred by the sacred pools,
And so, the subterranean way we desire not to enter;
The spirit of the classics is seen in nature;
Hence a dip in the first pool is not necessary.
The effect of our actions in the previous birth
Is felt in this life, and so the second pool is redundant.
Unshaken in pursuit of truth, and loving all creatures.
We get all that we desire; so the third gift is unwanted.
You go to worship the god you adore,
And let us go on the long journey to *Maturai*."
So he spoke words convincingly to the brahmin;
With *Kovalan* of firm purpose, they proceeded,
And after spending the hot day in a fair hamlet.
Kannaki and *Kavunti* in great weariness
Lingered on the wayside, while *Kovalan* walked
To a pool nearby to quench his thirstiness;
The spirit of the wood, in love with *Kovalan*,
Hopefully assumed the form of *Vacantamalai*,
Fell at his feet weeping, and spoke:
The lover's appeal I penned on a screwpine petal
Was not improper, but you have not spoken well
And so Kovalan returned it and treated me cruelly.

Matavi my mistress thus accused me and down she fell
Unconscious; when she recovered she continued
Men even of superior kind who doubtless exude
Goodness, generosity and learning consider courtesans
A disease, and ill treat them; do I deserve it?

Kovalan meet the spirit of the wood

"Her red eyes shed pearly tears; she tore her coral
Chain that is as pure as white moonlight
And threw it away, and banished me from sight.
Having heard of your journey from travellers
I followed you painfully in the company of traders.
Tell me what I am to do, you wise one;"
Kovalan, forewarned about this wood-siren,
Knew also the *mantras* to get himself free
From her magic, and as he uttered the word,

The siren disappears as Kovalan uses the mantra

The siren confessed, "I am a wanderer in this wood,
And I did bind you with magic, it is true;
But let not your wife, who like a peacock, is fair,
Nor *Kavunti* of saintly virtue know," and disappear
She did instantly; *Kovalan* had his drink of water,
And carried some in a lotus leaf to *Kannaki*
And *Kavunti* who were thirsty and weary.
Under the cool shade of *Kuravam, Maravam,*
Hopea and kino they took asylum,
The boiling heat of the sun being so irksome.
Besides desolate ones, the hardy and bold
Maravas of this rainless region who wield
Mighty bows crossed this desert wild.
Their goddess, having an eye on her forehead,
The great *puvai* or *Aiyai* with vehicle undefiled,
Had a temple there to which the travellers repaired.

Canto 12 - Song of the *Vettuvars*

In the blazing sun *Kannaki* trembled with exhaustion,
Who used to dress her fragrant hair in many a fashion;
Walking on the burning earth, she sighed over and over;
She and *Kavunti* were led to *korravai* temple for shelter.

Calini, the priestess speaks

Calini, priestess to the *Marava* community,
Ensured that every vow was kept by the laity;
Now, spirit-possessed, Her hair standing on end,
And arms spread out, she made the clansmen bound
As if by spell; in the village hall she harangued loudly:
"Our enemies are jubilant that their cattle multiply;
This hall decays, our earnings dwindle,
And like cowards we eke out a living;
We fail in our dues to *Korravai*
Who won't bless our enterprises without due sacrifices."

The sacrifice of the Maravars

The *Maravars* gave their own heads as sacrifice,
Leaving the counting to others, who were witnesses;
Their custom was not to die of disease and burn the bodies.

Choosing one of their virgins, they tied her hair
With a gold string, looking like a viper;

How they chose their priestess

Knotted her curly hair at the top of her head,
And tied the white horn of a boar,
Its horn resembling a crescent moon,
Put on the necklace of the teeth of a grown-up tiger,
Wrapped her waist with the skin of a leopard,
Striped and spotted; gave her a bow lovingly made,
Finally seated her on the back of a deer
With spiralling horns, and handed in to her
Dolls, parrots, wild cocks, blue peacocks, cats,
These offerings all
To goddess *Korravai*, and worshipped her.

Coloured paste, lime powder, cool sandal, boiled dhal
and beans,
Gingili cake, meat cooked with rice, flowers, incense,
And other ceremonial things were carried by
Serving wenches following her; drums for robbery,
Bugles for plunder, horns, pipes, famed trumpets
All sounded together, and the musicians stood tense
Before her, and all prayed at the altar of sacrifice
For former victories granted, and adored their goddess.
Pointing to *Kannaki* of fragrant hair
Who bore all the pains of her perfect pair

The priestess speaks of Kannaki

Of feet to be with her lord and husband,
"She is the darling of *Konkunatu* the godsend
Of *Kutamalai;* paragon among women
Of south Tamilnadu the reward of virtue,
As a gem the purest in the world."
So spoke *Calini*, god-inspired:
"This wise person spoke indiscriminately
In her frenzy," remarked *Kannaki,*
Shy and smiling, and stood behind
The broad back of her dear husband.

Description of Korravai

The goddess wears a crescent on her head,
Has an unblinking eye on her forehead,
She has ruby lips and silver laughter,
Having drunk poison, her neck is blue in colour,
Has a bow with *meru* mountain bent,
And stringed with the raging serpent,
Has a bra of snake with teeth of venom,
And holds a spear on her bangled arm;
With anklet on her left leg and a heroic ring
On the right, she holds the sword all-conquering.
Having subdued the monster *Avunan*
With a buffalo's head on a torso human.
In her many forms -- the undying goddess,
The ever young, the dark-coloured goddess,

The undefeated, the goddess of the spear,
Has many worshippers devoted to her.

Description of Aiyai

Our patroness *Aiyai*, the goddess of affluence,
Sword-handed, riding the leaping stag,
Goddess of the arts, wears the ring of courage
As well as jewels of rare magnificence;
Such were her beauty and virgin innocence
That her relations stood in reverence;
Visibly transformed into *Korravai* deity
She made her prophetic utterance truly.
Cinnamon, citrus, sandal, anjan,
Mango and chay trees spread their aroma
In front of the sacrificial altar of potent
Korravai, Lord *Civa's* feminine aspect.
Kino's golden flowers, red petals of silk cotton,
Pure white flowers of laurel lay in a scatter
On the ground before the goddess of matted hair,
On which resides the crescent moon.
White cedar, alexandrian laurel, aromatic screw tree,
Trumpet and hopea were in full bloom;
On the branches bees sang many a tune,
As in vina, before *Tirumal's* young sister.
This virgin who wears every ornament of *Korravai*,
Has a dignity, becoming a deity;
Our excellent bowmen and this young virgin
Sprang from the same unique *Vettuvar* clan;
Her pudendum is like the hood of a serpent,
Her sense of piety high, without precedent;
Along with Einer bowmen she belonged
To the class of near superhuman beings.
Korravai's vehicle is the swift-running deer,
Her beauty is matched by this girl without peer;
Wearing gold bangles, she has the nobleness,
Come from the bold men of bamboo bows,
Belonging to the heroic clan of Eyinars.

Wrapped in elephant hide, and wearing leopard's skin,
She stood on the head of a male buffalo;
Venerated more than the *Vedas*,
She symbolished the essence of spirituality.

"Wielding the sword in your bangled arm,
You destroyed *Mahishasura* the demon;
Riding an antelope with spiral horn,
You stood proud, and you live as the flaming unity
In the hearts of *Civa*, *Vishnu*, and *Brahma*;
Remaining an incomprehensible mystery.
In your lotus hand you hold a conch and a *cakra*;
You rode on the buffalo, angry as the lion with eyes red;

You are merged with the body of *Civa*, who has *Ganga*
In his locks, and a third eye on his forehead.

The *Vedas* praise you as the feminine godhead!
Thus equipped, you wore a garland, thick woven
With golden shower and sacred basil, and in a woman's form
You performed a wooden-legged dance to the dismay
Of the *Acuras*, and to the rejoicing of the *Devas*.
With gold anklets and bangles tinkling, you danced
On wooden legs to crush the sinister *Acuras*,
Who were great swordsmen, while the *Devas* rejoiced,
Pouring flowers like rain on your pure self.

An untried Eyinar youth, longing to raid enemy land,
Bring back cattle, and the victor's garland,
Prays for *korravai's* blessing;
In the woods outside the enemy village,
A black bird in a harsh voice gave warning
Of disaster, heeding which he turned back.

The angry *Marava*, too poor to buy liquor,
Goes to the enemy village on a raid,
Hoping that the bird omen will be in favour,
And sure of success with *Korravai* on his side.

Brown and young lass of Eyinar class!
Look at the healthy cattle your elders have taken;
The blacksmith, the drummer, and the bard
Stall them, each in his courtyard.
You whose smile is tender like peacock quill,
Look at the other herd that fills the courtyards
Of toddy-sellers, spies, and omen-readers;
These also were captured by your elders;
You who have collyriumed and flower-like eyes,
Look at the cattle jostling the frontyards
Of grey old beards and women of harsh words:
These also were by your elders snatched from foes,
Who shouted in fear and helplessness.

You save from dire peril the sages
And the *Devas*, who moderate the sun's rays;
At your feet we pray to accept the sacrifice
Of blood by the brave Eyinars as the price
Due to thee for victory over their foes.
Before your sapphire blue form, haloed *devas*
And their king bow down in reverence;
At your flowery feet we pray for acceptance
The blood of Eyinars as the price of victory
Due to thee, for taking cattle from the enemy.
With drum, horn and timbrel march the Eyinars;

In dark nights they are like tigers;
At your feet blood from their necks issue

As sacrifice; pray accept it as your due.
Goddess *Parvati, Durga, Kali*, and you,
Wearing the crescent and the serpent on your hair,
Deign to accept the gifts of bow-bearing Einers,
And bless them to proper in what they are masters,
That of plundering large numbers of travellers.
As the *tevars*, at sight of poison, were terrified,
You goddess drank it all yourself and survived!
Pray accept the gifts and bless the Eyinar
Who hesitate not to plunder sleeping villagers
By first panicking them with the sound of drums;
You felled the *maruta* trees, and overturned the carts,
Thus defeating your uncle's evil intent, neat;
May you pardon the Einers who only rob and hurt,
And accept their offerings of meat.

The first among deities, the *vedas* revere,
Sanctified the high-hilled *Potiyil*,
That became sacred to *Akattiya* later,
May the *Pantiya* king, ruler of *Potiyil*,
Be crowned with success against his enemy,
And wear the victor's garland of *vetci*.

Canto 13 - Suburban Sojourn

Kovalan makes a request to Kavunti

The *Calini* interlude over, *Kovalan*
Touched the feet of his saintly companion
And said, "This lady of mine can bear not
The heat of intense summer: her feet have not
Learnt to walk on the hot rubble of this region.
Under the just rule of the southern king
The bears, clever in fighting their enemies,
Stir not out of their lair; the tigers burning
Bright, cease to be fierce enemies
Of the deer; the snakes, the crocodiles that feign
To get at their victims, the spirits that harm men,

All are disciplined in the glorious *Pantiyan* reign.

Is it not better then to journey at night
In the cool rays of the moon whose light
Is a joy to everyone, and then safety is bright?"
Kavunti assenting, they waited for the sun to set
Like the subject of a tyrant for his eternal rest;
The moon, ancestor of the southern rulers
Rose up, leading an army of stars,
Casting milkwhite rays on all quarters.

Goddess Earth speaks to Kannaki endearing words

"For long your lovely breasts have been strangers
To the touch of corals in a chain like a row of stars;
Your jasmine locks have long forgotten
The use of lilies and their association;
Your chaste and delicate body has forsaken
The feel of sprigs of sandal and flowers in season;
The Southwind, born in *Potiyil*, bred in *Maturai*,
And favoured of poets ceased to be your ally;
With equal fervour did you dislike the moon
And its cool beams; now it is a blessed boon,
May you be happy," spoke the Earth goddess
Who, taking a deep sigh, became speechless.

Kannaki was exhausted in body and mind,
And to her *Kovalan* spoke, "You will hear
On the way the roar of the tiger, the grunt of the bear,
And the screech of the owl never mind."
He put her arm on his shoulder, and they walked on
Listening to the words of wisdom spoken
By holy *Kavunti*; in this dry bamboo thicket
The wild fowl heralded sunrise as if by trumpet;
Soon they reached a settlement of brahmins,
Who made a living as musicians
Instead of the traditional professions,
Kovalan left the women in a place well enclosed,
While he alone the thorny fence crossed
And walked towards a large pool of water.
There *Kaucikan*, *Matavi*'s messenger,
Saw him, but could not be sure of the person
Since *Kovalan* had changed in complexion
Like the bellows in a smithy, in isolation
Besides being in bad emaciated condition.
Being clever, he addressed a creeper in a bower
"In *Kovalan's* absence, long-eyed *Matavi* is in despair;
You likewise have lost all your wonted vigour
In this scorching heat; rightly her name you bear."
Hearing this *Kovalan* approached the speaker
And asked him, "What meaning do your words bear?"
Kaucikan exclaimed; "He still cares, it is he I have here"

And he told *Kovalan* in a mood earnest,

Kaucikan speaks to Kovalan

"Your father with his immense wealth,
And your mother, the queen of his hearth,
Felt lost like a serpent dispossessed
Of its precious jewel; your relations lamented
As if the breath of life had departed;
The servants, on your father's order, have gone
In search of you; the people of *Pukar* were prone
To weep and wail like those of *Ayotti*
When, in obedience to his father, *Rama*
Left for the forest; *Matavi* on hearing
From *Vacantamalai* your harsh and stinging
Words, was filled with the pangs of separation,
Followed by a change in her skin coloration;
She fell into love sickness and was bedridden
In the middle storey of her huge mansion;
Calling on her one day I heard her petition:
I pray you, relieve my affliction.
And with her flower-soft hand wrote a billet-doux,
Put the seal and gave it to me with advice due,
'Show it to my lord, precious as my eyes.'
After long wanderings here I set eyes on you."
So saying he gave *Kovalan Matavi's* letter
Written in profound grief and despair.
At sight of the seal *Kovalan* keenly became aware
Of the joys he had with the girl of fragrant hair;
He took the letter and read what was there.

Kovalan reads the letter sent by Matavi

"I prostrate myself before your spirituality.
Bear with me for these words of immaturity;
Forgetting your filial duty you left home
With your well-born wife at night time.
What made you do this? Could it be my follv?
Vainly I search my heart for a reply.
Let me beg you tell the truth and cure my malady.
Praise to you who are above untruth!"
Understanding the quality of her mind,

Kovalan's reaction

He said, "She is guiltless," in relief to his mind;
It is my fault, he confessed, penitent in mind.
"This seal and letter will clarify matters;
To my guiltless parents I offer prayers;
Please make haste and show this letter
To them and let them not suffer."

Kovalan returned to his wife, chaste and spotless,
And to the holy *Kavunti* of principles, truly religious.
Seeking a band of minstrels there, he too in empathy
Danced and sang in praise of warlike *Korravai;*
Borrowing from the minstrels a red-lined
Vina with seven strings, and with an expert hand

Kovalan joins the minstrels in singing

Tuned it, and played songs delightfully well-defined,
Dancing and singing in unison with the band.
On querying the minstrels he received the intelligence
That *Maturai* city lay not at a far distance.
They could get a whiff of *Maturai* in the air,

Nearing Maturai

As it carried different kinds of city odour
Like the sweet smell of myrrh and incense,
Sandal, musk, cempak, jasmine and lily;
The fumes from home and restaurant kitchens,
Besides the perfumes used by lovers liberally;
The fumes arising from sacrifices to the deity,
The perfumes of the victorious *Pantiya* king's mansion;
The whole ensemble altering Southwind's quality,
Though *potiyil* wind it is that wins poets' admiration.

Were one to go all alone, there would be nobody,
To bar the way, as there is perfect safety.
After rest they resumed at night their journey.
And their ears caught the noise of the city:
The matin songs sung at the temple of *Civa*,
As well as those at the palace of the king,
The brahmins' recital of the hymns in the *vetas*,
The swordsmen's songs in praise of the king,
The trumpeting of enemy's elephants that are angry,
And that of the wild elephants resenting captivity,
The proud horses in the stalls neighing,
The palace guards' drum beating --
All these noises sounded like the boisterous ocean;
This filled them with joy, their weariness forgotten.

Vaikai described

The two sides of *Vaikai*, thick with trees that flower
Red hopea, kino, Indian oak, and medlar,
Wild laurel, almond, champak, trumpet,
And black nightshade -- formed her outer garment.
Bamboo, Arabian and Spanish jasmine,
And bindweeds decorate her loins.
Her waist is encircled by *bimbi*, *Pitavam*
And *atukku mallege*; her pudendum is outlined
By the flower-decked banks that declined.
The land pieces in mid river, big at the base
With bulging sides, and rising in equal heights
Are like her erect and shining breasts.
Her red lips are the petals from the coral tree
That lie scattered on the area.
The jasmine flowers that sail with the ripple
Are her white teeth and beautiful.
The criss-crossing carps her eyes;
The black sand, heavy with flowers, her tresses.
The generous hearted lady who guards

The land and who is sung by the bards,
Is *Vaikai*, patroness of the *Pantiya* lands.
Having foreknowledge of *Kannaki's* tragedy,
She wrapped herself up completely,
Suppressed her tears, and was calm outwardly.

Swan-gaited *Kannaki* and her lord and master
Stood in prayer, touched by the grace
Of the flowery water of *Vaikai* river.

In the main wharf were moored boats with figures
Of horses', elephants', or lions' heads, but the visitors
Chose a humble boat from a quiet wharf.
Then crossing the watery expanse in a wooden boat,
Got down at a small jetty, and sought
A less-frequented grove filled with fragrance.
The sacred city of *Maturai*, seat of many a noble king,
Should be respectfully approached-- that was their feeling.
And they came round the indestructible moat encircling
The city walls, from the left before entering.
The long dark nelumbo, lily and lotus flowers,
As if they knew the impending tragedy of the lovers,
Shed tears, and the petals trembled in fear,
While the bees kept on with their murmur;
The victorious banner of the king floating high
Seemed to warn, "please don't come here,"
And turning its face to the wind, flew high.

Reach the outskirts of Maturai

Outside the city limits lay a hamlet
Where *Kavunti* led her companions;
The good and the generous loved the hamlet:
High-yielding coconuts, areca and plantains
Flourished; well-fed fields and lakes abounded;
Halls of bamboo, and bright homes with joy resounded.

Canto 14 - A Tour of *Maturai*

Each grove, water-rich farm, and ripe field
In this village came to life with the chorus of birds
At dawn; so also the sun, benefactor of the world,

Rose up and made the lotus to open their buds;
The sun woke up *Maturai*, famed for its ruler,
At whose name enemy kings shook with fear.

At the temple of *Civa*, with an eye on the brow's middle,
Of *Vishnu* with the banner of the eagle,
Of *Balarama* with the ploughshare triumphant,
Of *Muruka* with the banner of the rooster,
At the retreat of the sages, of *dharma* observant,
And at the palace of the king, master of war culture,
The white conch was blown and the drum beaten
To announce the birth of another morn.

Kovalan makes another requests to Kavunti

Kovalan went and folded his hands in greeting
To *Kavunti* who was praying, and made a plea:
"Straying from the virtuous path, causing
Terrible pain to the gentle and frail lady
In a strange land during this hard journey,
I feel ashmed, O ascetic! Let me
Go to inform the rich merchants of this city
Of my condition, and till my return I put her
Under your protection; is it a great bother?"

Kavunti says in reply

"You have suffered greatly with your dear wife
As a result of your previous sinful life!
Fate is powerful, and is unfailing in its action;
Knowing this, please give up your acts of sin.
In vain do the virtuous ones labour
To explain the cause of goodness, and belabour
Again and again with words as cudgel,
And tongues as drums, at evil;
Those that are enchanted by passion's hues
Never accept and practise virtues.
Cruel fate tortures the ungodly,
Who faint and suffer follishly;
When fate overtakes the learned and the wise,
They bear with patience, stoicwise;
The pain of death, the pain of union,
And the pangs of separation are common to men;
In single blessedness there is no suffering
Pleasures of love and eating entail misery;
Erotic love in the end leads to suffering,
It is true now and for ever, believe me;
From olden times there has been tragic suffering:
As the father wished, the son left for the forest
With his wife; when she was forced to be away
He felt miserable though he was Lord *Vishnu*,
Father of *Brahma!* it is a long story you know.

"At the fall of dice *Nala* lost his land and sovereignty.
With his tender wifie he reached the forest, where
He left her, though his love was honest and pure;
Neither was she in any way guilty.
Even so in the forest at midnight he left his wife,
Fate willed it, and if you think not so tell me why?
You are unlike them, being inseparable from your wife;
So you may go to the *Pantiya* city of *Maturai*,
With a light heart, find out a suitable place
To reside in, and come back apace."

Maturai city in those days

A moat, fenced and guarded, encircled the city,
And there was also a large underground passage,
Through which herds of elephants could go safely.
Kovalan gained entry through the passage.
The Greek soldiers who guarded the city gate
With flashing swords suspected not *Kovalan*
Who, on entering the city, saw it scintillate
As if the ornaments of the thousand eyed *Indran*
Lay before him in the casket that was open.
The creepers were dancing in the Southwind

Courtesans and bought love

As the courtesans and their paramours
Came out of their houses and walked towards
Vaikai to their favourite bathing ghat,
There they took rafts and boats with oars
To swim and frolic all the way to the other shore
Carpeted with white sands everywhere.

Dress and appearance of women

There were girls seeking pastime in the glen
Nearby, resembling golden creepers, with lilies
In their hair, corals from *Korkai*, and jasmine
Garlands round their necks, and sandal
From the southern hills smeared on their bodies.
Young women wearing all their finery
Sat proud and happy, listening

Their behaviour

To their lovers' words of sweetness and flattery
On the couches in the courtyard at evening.
The women wore above their slips embroidered silk apparels;
Their bunched hair received olive flowers as well as
Gold fussia that grow in *cirumalai* hills;
Their breasts carried coral necklaces,
And designs in red sandal paste, and stuck
On it were *Kotuveri* flowers -- all this favoured
By *Indra*, lord of rainclouds who severed
The wings of mountains with his weapon, the *Vaccira*.

Women of a different kind

The modest woman relaxes with her lover,
Whose chest is anointed with fragrant
Cosmetic, near the fireside, incandescent
With logs of the blinding tree; every aperture

In the wall shaped like the eye is a casement
That is kept closed; each mansion a skyscraper
Built by a master of architecture.

Women of wealth

Wealthy women and their children
Seek the courtyard to enjoy the morning sun,
Leaving the inner yard, designed for exposure
To the moonbeams, as the sun's sphere
Commences in the South, and during the early
Season of dewfall white clouds are scanty.

Moreover, in the vast sea in many a vessel
Does the king of *Tonti* bring his tribute
Of incense, silk, sandal, and spices to boot;

Love-god roams freely

The Southwind wafts these smells to *Kutal*
And lovingly touches the God of love whose darts
Arouse erotic fancies in many hearts.
Is not the season of late dewfall coeval
With these pleasant sights and festival?

"It is spring when *matavi* of serried flowers
Puts forth creepers, and in garden and plain
There is bloom; when the Southwind of *Potiyil* origin
Enters *kutal* and confers all his favours.
But where has he gone?" Was the thought of the women
Lithe and slender, like creepers, in the season
Of deep summer while enjoying love's delights.

Heat of Summer

Herds of elephants trembled in the heat
Of this rocky mountain region;
So ubiquitous was the heat
That it seemed the forest was on fire;
The summer king had spent himself here
So much that another area was chosen.

The royal lover lavishes on his sweet heart
Covered wagon, palanquin, jewelled cot.

Royal lover and his sweet heart

Jaunt in pleasure gardens,
Fans of white fur, gold betel boxes, and
Sharp-edged swords as love tokens.
They enjoy connubial bliss at the end.

The speckled bees hover round until they perch
On the women's garlands, their favourite niche;
The women drive them away for their presumption,
And yet their lips, red like the petals of silk-cotton,
Smile by way of contradiction; get drunk
Served in goblets golden;
To their lovers they speak words unclear

That arouse in the hearers only laughter;
Yet they are spoken with a mischievous smile;
Their eyes are like carps, ever volatile:
They take on the red of lilies to show dissatisfaction,
The arched brows bend inward.
On the forehead gather beads of perspiration;
Scions of rich families are drawn toward
Such lovely women who are also wanton;
In *Maturai* such liaisons are common.

Great dancers

So rich were the houses of the great dancers
That great kings felt honoured to be visitors;
They knew both scientific and folk dancing
And could sing songs suited to the occasion;
Rhythms and bodily representation in unison
With the music of the instruments observing,
They excelled in the four forms of repose,
Movement, standing still, and reclining pose;
They perfected seven modes, where music
And dance harmony were the things basic;
Some in their time were acclaimed the greatest;
The aged ones did the prima donnas assist
By specializing in initial singing;
Some the middle, yet others in ballad singing.
Fair danseuses their favours sold
For a thousand and eight pieces of gold
A day, and many a wealthy gallant
Enticed by looks and talents did gallivant.
Pious men, sparks and amorists
All were fair meat for these artistes,
Whose voice was sweet as a parrot's,
And melodious as music, with their mastery
Of the sixtyfour arts; and no wonder it's
That they occupied two whole streets.

Rich and costly wares displayed in the bazaar

Carriages of many kinds, metal armours,
Wood and ivory carvings, pearl-handled spears,
Brass and coir works, shields of leather,
Flowers woven into many shapes, fans of white fur,
Pipes for burning incense, and collyrium jars were there
In the bazaar that even kings may desire.

Precious stones for sale

Flawless diamonds, without crow's foot,
Opacity or lines and spots, and clean cut
And in approved colours and of beneficial
Kind were exhibited for sale;
Sapphires free of lines and spots, of pure rays
And cool, found there an honoured place.
Rubies, emeralds, cat's eyes, and others
Of fine quality were sold in shop counters;

Topaz, amethyst, amber, jade, opal and beryl
Were also equally available.
The nature of these gems was familiar
To the people of *Maturai*, who did prosper
In the absence of the troubles and perils of war.

Gold for sale

In the shops in particular streets selling bullion,
Flags indicating the kinds of gold therein
Sold were flown -- red, purple, yellow and green.

Textile shops

There were streets exclusively for textiles:
Cotton, woolen, and silk fabrics were in piles;
In convenient lengths also they were kept folded
In shops contiguously situated.

Grocer's shops

Brokers always carried weights and measures,
Tools of their trade, to the market for groceries;
In certain other streets lay in profusion
Bags of pepper, cereals, and every provision.
Walking along the market, the four main streets,
The office area, the lanes and cross streets,
Passing intersections of three or four ways,
Kovalan, protected by the sun's rays,
Visited every part of *Maturai* city
Before returning to his wife and *Kavunti*.

Canto 15 - Taking Asylum

Justice was dear to the king, and he never deviated;
The land was fertile, and the people contented;
The sovereign was noted for his administration
As well as force of arms, and no citizen
Ever dreamt of foregoing the city and his gain;
With impressions like these, *Kovalan* returned
To his temporary suburban habitation
In the village that holy men much favoured;
He explained to *Kavunti* the wondrous city
That was free from evil and its King's nobility.

In *Talaiccenkanam* surrounded by rich fields
Matalan was born; he gained full *vedic* knowledge,
And had a benevolent heart; visiting *Potiyil* hills
He worshipped *Akattiya*, and had the privilege
Of taking a holy sea bath in *Kanniyakumari*.
On this return he sought the asylum of *Kavunti;*
There *Kovalan* paid him respectful salutation;
Introducing himself, *Matalan* began his narration:

Matalan speaks to Kovalan

"Honoured by the king, *Matavi*, the famous dancer,
Possessing a mangoshoot complexion
Was delivered of a female child, and soon after
She resumed normal life, her kith and kin,
The aged courtesans, wished to name the child
In a fitting manner, and you were overjoyed.

Kovalan's words recalled

'In midnight darkness an ancestor of mine
Shipwrecked in a tempest, swam for days,
Thanks to charities done in former life,
Until goddess *Manimekalai* did appear
And rescue him, she being the local deity
Subordinate to *Indra;*' as his saviour
She became the family deity; let her name
Be given to my daughter -- *Manimekalai;*'
A thousand courtesans in *mekalai*
Blessed the child with that name.

Heroism of Kovalan

He, who was an example of holy living,
But weak and bent in body, leaning
On a stick, went from door for alms,
When an elephant in rage, escaping
From its mahout, caught him easily;
You rushed at its trunk with an yell
And released the victim; then climbed
On its back like *Vincaiyan* on a hill,
Kicked at the hump, and curbed the animal.

When a brahmin deserted his wife for her sin,
A piece of writing in Sanskrit he gave her
Which she could show to any person
Who knew his duties; she in tears bitter,
Went about searching from house to house
For a good man, as after all, her sin lay
In killing by mistake a mongoose.
You came forward and made proper
Propitiation for the lady's sin, united
Husband and wife, showered on the pair
Gold and riches, with which they started
A happy life once again; in character
And worldly goods you are beyond compare!

"An evil person maligned an honest woman
To her husband, and caused her to suffer;
He was caught by a genie that took the life
Of nine types of evil-doers; the victim's mother
Wept and wailed; filled with commiseration
You offered in exchange your life,
But the genie refused, saying in explanation:
'I am not a brute to kill a good person.'
Straightaway the genie killed and ate the victim,
At which the mother was broken-hearted;
The victim's wife and relations you supported
For years; your generosity is beyond measure."

Having done good and heroic deeds in this life,
Wise one; why do you suffer along with your dear wife?
Could it be that you committed misdeeds in your previous
life?

In answer, *Kovalan* his dream recounted:
In a large city where royalty resided,
I saw my fragrant-haired wife trembling and grieving,
While I, stripped of every clothing,
Rode a male bison; and my curly haired wife
And I ascended to a life beyond life.

Next I saw *Matavi* giving away *Manimekalai*
To be consecrated to serve the Buddha,
While the god of love, in sighs and tears, cast
His flowery arrows away in disgust;
All this I dreamed, but so real it seemed;
In the dark before dawn I dreamed:
As such it is likely to happen in reality;
Hence I left *Pukar* in haste, and came fast.

Kovalan asked to shift

"This *ashram* is for *sanyasins* as asylum,
That will inhibit married people's freedom;
The wealthy merchants of the city will be happy
To accommodate you in the city;
Hence, shift before Sunday evening, *Kovalan*,"
Said *Kavunti* and the wise *Matalan*.

The *Ayar* matron, *Matari* was just then returning
From the temple of *Iyakky* after offering
Milk and rice to the ever-benevolent deity;
Seeing *Kavunti* she fell at her feet in piety.

The life of *Ayars* cannot really be hard:
They rear kine, and share the yield;
This matron is kind and of good culture;
I can entrust *Kannaki* to her.

Kavunti speaks to Matari

With such thoughts *Kavunti* spoke to her:
"*Matari*, listen! This lady's husband's father
Is esteemed so much that the community leader
Himself would give a rare welcome,
And have this dark-eyed beauty and her lord
As guests in his own well-guarded home;
Till then let me leave them in your care."
Bathe this blessed lady in pure water,
Apply collyrium to her long carplike eyes,
Put flowers on her fragrant hair,
In fresh apparel clothe her,
And be her friendly companion, kind nurse,
Devoted mother and look after her;
The world has not seen such dainty feet and tiny
As those of this tender lady who walked beside me;
Unmindful of her parched tongue and drooping body,
She suffered for her husband, such her nobility;
She is divinity itself or I know none at all;
Haven't you heard of the saying;
'For the sake of chaste women, rains fall,
Justice prevails, and victory smiles on the king.'
The help rendered by the blessed, however tiny
It may seem, really brings joy heavenly.
Give ear to what I am going to say:
Jain monks preached seated on a pedestal
Under the shade of an acoka in bloom,
In the garden city of *Kavirippumpattinam;*
Suddenly they saw an apparition in their middle,
Its body bright as a rainbow; it wore gold jewellery
And garlands; it possessed superhuman power;
It showed a monkey's hand with a black finger,
Its divine form was visible only to eyes holy;
When asked about it by the congregation,
The monks explained the purpose of the visitation.
A titled merchant, *Cayalan* by name,
Performed all the rituals to his dear departed,
And for the feast many a guest came,
One was a holy man who was welcomed and waited
On by the lady of the house; in the crowd a monkey
Got in, and took shelter at the feet of the *sanyasi*,
Eating only the left-over food, and was grateful to the patron,
Who commended it to the lady who showered her affection
On it, and at its death performed all the ceremonies
Due to a son, and gave away as charity a piece
Of her property; later the monkey was born to the king,
Uttarakauttan in the city of *Varanaci;*
The prince grew up, and for thirtytwo years was ruling
The kingdom before he died; afterwards, as divinity
He was raised, and in memory of his past experience

Had a monkey hand, and he held in high reverence
The lady; to show this truth he made his appearance.

Those who followed *dharma*, those who were selfless,
Besides *Cayalan*, and his wife, were the gainers
In practising the truths spoken by the preachers,
As they attained heaven, the place of joy limitless.

"If you realize there is glory in serving others,
You may depart now with this lady
Of luxuriant hair"; after paying her respects
To *Kavunti* she followed her protegee gladly.

Kovalan and Kannaki go to Matari's village as her guests

With lovely, young and ripening breasts,
Shoulders curved like the bamboo,
And teeth like germinating corn,
Kannaki, wise beyond her years,
And a paragon among women
Had escorts like young shepherds,
Carrying ewes and lambs,
And shepherdesses with bangles
On their arms; they left at sundown.

Passing through the outer ring of defence,
They came upon the city fortifications,
Where weapons of war stood ready:
Bow that shot arrows automatically,
Black-fingered mechanical monkeys,
Copper-melting plants, iron smithies,
Catapults, shooting structures,
Boiling oil, piles of rocks, spears,
Chains, gaint hooks, squeezers,
Ovens shaped like human heads,
Sharp nails, sparrow heads,
Traps with boars' heads, projectiles,
Heavy logs, pushing rods, and missiles.
They crossed the main gate that flies
The flag of every kingdom overcome,
And at last they reached *Matari's* home.

Canto 16 - The Execution of *Kovalan*

Matari's hospitality

Shepherdess *Matari* felt very happy
To offer hospitality to a high-born lady;
A cottage for the guest she got ready;
It was newly thatched and pretty,
Its walls had red soil plastering,
And had all-round fencing.

Helped by her rustic cousins, *Matari*
Bathed *Kannaki* in fresh water,
Making her lovely as a flower;
She spoke to her admiringly:
"My dear mistress, your beauty
Is nature's creation, while jewelry
Makes city women look pretty.
You don't lack maids here to serve you:
My daughter *Aiyai* will give all due
Help, and you are my responsibility;
As a jewel I shall guard you zealously."
Saying this, she folded her hands in greeting,
Her mind filled with glad feeling.

Having overcome the difficulties during journey
For her two companions, the great and holy lady
Has now chosen the right place for them to stay,
Freeing *Kovalan* from worries; and *Aiyai*
Is there to provide all necessaries, and attend
On *Kannaki* who is to prepare food for her husband.
Accordingly, the women brought utensils,
Mature jack that the tree yields
Without flowering,like the gift of nobles;
Round cucumber with lines,
Pomegranates, mango, sweet plantains,
And brown rice besides milk and butter refined.

Kannaki a housewife

Slicing the vegetables her fingers reddened;
When she cooked them her face perspired,
And her red eyes became more reddened.
With *Aiyai* lighting the oven, *Kannaki* trained
In cooking, prepared tasty dishes for her husband;
Finally she left the kitchen, that fumes had darkened.

Inviting *Kovalan* to take his dining seat,
That was a mat woven of *tala* grass
Artistically, *Kannaki* washed *Kovalan's* feet
With water from an earthern pot;
She also sprinkled water on the ground, as if

To wake up from swoon mother Earth;
Mopping the floor clean before spreading
A plantain leaf before *Kovalan*
She served; from outside *Aiyai* and *Matari*
Looked on with wonder at their beauty.
Matari imagined young *Krishna*
Would be like *Kovalan* in the house of *Yacotara*
Who was a cowherdess like her.
She envied her for her good fortune
In bringing up the wonder child, Krishna,
Whose blue complexion was like a flower
Newly sprung; she imagined *Kannaki*
As *Nappinnai* who relieved the suffering
Of Krishna on the banks of river *Tolunai*.
Kovalan relaxed soon after, chewing
The betel leaf tendered by *Kannaki*,
Whom he called to his side and embraced.

Kovalan asks Kannaki

He said, "How much our parents felt distressed
Over your suffering as you walked wearily
On stone and thorn in the desert sun
And forest area, I can only guess;
Is it due to my evil deeds in my previous
Birth? I do not know for certain,
If the present state is only imagination.
The dishonest, the licentious, and the degenerate
Having been my companions I lost my reputation.
Goodness I scorned; for me is there salvation?
Of my duty to my parents I was unmindful,
To you, preciously wise, I was unfaithful,
Yet when I asked you to go with me instantly,
Why did you assent immediately? "

Kannaki's reply

"When, as a housewife, I ceased to be,
Hostess to worthy people I could not be;
Neither *sanyasis*, brahmins nor ascetics
Could receive patronage from me.
Before your dear and noble father,
I put on a brave face and behaviour,
As if your separation did not affect me;
They understood, and graciously spoke to me,
Though inwardly they grieved while you
A wrong way of life continued to pursue,
And I did not try to change you
On principle; so when you asked me to go
With you I obeyed with alacrity and no more."

Kovalan continues

"You turned your back on the first among relations,
Your parents, on your maids, on your nurse,
On devoted companions and others;
With modesty, shyness and chastity as guardians

You came with me and my grief did abate;
Shall I call you precious gold, a creepr pretty,
A garland of flowers; you are shyness incarnate,
Light of the world, flower of chastity, mistress of beauty!
One of your anklets I shall sell and return;
Till then be at peace, without any concern."
He hugged and embraced her with fervour,
To look at her without her maids made him bitter,
And his eyes filled with tears;
He walked away from the shepherds' quarters

Kovalan leaves for Maturai

With a heavy heart; when a bull with a hump
Advanced towards him as if to gore him;
He knew not itwas a bad omen
As, among his people, this belief was not common;

Kovalan goes to the city

He went past tree-lined streets, strewn with pollen,
Past the streets where lived the temple women,
And finally entered the market region.

There *Kovalan* saw a hundred
Goldsmiths, highly skilled in their art,
Headed by one who held a rod in his hand,
And had a coat on; *Kovalan* thought

Kovalan asks the goldsmith

That that man should be the king's craftsman,
And approached him with the question,
"Here is a jewel fit for the consort of a king.
This, could you help me in marketing?"

Who answers

"That I don't know as I only make, may be,
A diadem for the king down to simple things."
He said in deceptive humility, greeting me
With folded hands -- to mortal beings
Certain death. As *Kovalan* gave the anklet
The goldsmith opened it for examination, to find
Diamonds and rubies expertly inset,
And gold workmanship of the finest kind.

"This anklet suits none but the king's consort
And I shall discuss with the king this matter;
Until my return you may take comfort
In the cottage situated younder."
Accordingly to the cottage near a temple
Kovalan proceeded, making it simple
For the goldsmith to carry out his plot.

The goldsmith soliloquises

'Before my theft of the queen's anklet
Gets exposed, and my scheme defeated,
I shall clear myself of the king's suspicion
By framing this stranger;' the hardened villain
Acted the innocent and departed.

The Queen is angry with the king

The women of *Kutal* by their dances, the tunes
And words of their songs have made a capture
Of the king, thought the queen in jealousy;
And she retired to her chamber pretending
Headache; unusually piqued, the king
Hastened to the queen's chamber,
With long-eyed maids in attendance;
On seeimg him from the well-guarded entrance,
The goldsmith fell prostrate in abject humility;
And indulged in fulsome flattery.

The king is addressed by the Goldsmith

"Without burgling tools, the thief skilfully
Used magic and induced hypnosis
On the guards, so he could steal the royal jewel;
Escaping from our bungling police,
He is hiding in a cottage near the temple,"
Said the goldsmith diabolical.

The hasty decision of the king

Fate willed that the neem-garlanded *Pantiyan*
Should impulsively send for the city-watchmen,
And order them to fetch the royal anklet
From the thief and to kill him for it.

As the king showed the expected reaction
The villain took the king's men to *Kovalan*
To whom he said, "These are the potent king's men
Come to see the anklet in your possession."
He described the jewel in detail to the men,
Adding that it belonged to the queen,
And that the thief before them had it stolen.

The goldsmith and the watchmen

They said that the accused had every quality
A good man should have, and could not be guilty.
But the goldsmith laughed scornfully,
Deriding them, he gave his reasons cleverly
"Thieves who live on stolen goods have practices
Like magic, mystery, medicine, omen, cleverness,
Place, time and tool from which to choose;
If you take his medicine you break the king's law,
If they speak words of magic we feel awe;
If they contemplate the form divine, we expose
Our possessions, and stand comatose
While they rob. If they hypnotise us
We lose the power to move. If there is good omen,
Or if valuables reach them without pain,
They like it not; if they choose a way
As advised in their book, they can spirit away
The garland worn by *Indra:* If they decide
To steal a thing who can prevent?
If time favours them they are unstoppable;
When they use tools they are invisible;

For them night is as good as day,
There even the noble-born have no say;
Knowing where they are going to plunder
Is a sign for us to leave: it is better."

The goldsmith continues

"A royal messenger was loitering during daylight
Near the palace years ago; he returned at night
Dressed as a woman, gained entry and getting
Into the chamber, where the crown prince was sleeping,
He stole a diamond necklace from the prince,
Who, on waking up, realized the thief's impudence,
And immediately drew his sword,
While the thief defended with the scabbard;
The prince got ready to wrestle; his enemy was nowhere:
Could you thing of his equal anywhere?"

A young watchman speaks

Then a young man with a sharp spear spoke:
"An armed robber in blue, like a black leopard,
In the rainy season, at midnight entered,
Where I was on the watch; he drew his sword
I was prepared, but he disappeared with my sword;
To know the ways of robbers is hard;
The king's order I dare not disregard;
Tell me what I am to do, my armed comrades!"

One of them kills Kovalan

Then an ignorant drunkard swung his sword,
That slashed *Kovalan* across, and his blood
Flowed freely; the goddess of Earth went
Into grief; the king's sceptre was bent;
As *Kovalan* died of wounds, the old fate
Ran its course; retribution was complete.
Through time inexorable fate gathered power,
And resulted in bending a just king's sceptre
Because of *Kannaki's* husband, *Kovalan;*
Therefore let everyone learn a lesson.

Canto 17 - The Music and Dance of Milkmaids

The *Pantiya's* sign of the fish was first etched
On top of *Imayam*; later the *Cera* bow,
And the *Cola* leopard appeared; *Navalam* and
The *Cera Cola* kings paid the ruler of the world,
The *Pantiya*, tributes; he wore a pearl garland
And had a white parasol; the sound of drums
In the morning from the palace was heard
By *Matari* reminding her of her turn to supply
Ghee, and she rushed to the buttery with *Aiyai*.

Omens'

"Milk curdles not, bulls' eyes fill with tears;
These are premonitions of disaster;
Butter doesn't melt; the frisking lambs lie unmoving:
Surely some catastrophe is in the offing;
The four-nippled cows tremble; bells fall from necks:
These are certain signs of a tragic happening."

"The milk in pots curdled not;
The bulls' eyes with tears did fill;
The butter in cups melted not;
The leaping lambs lay still;
The cattle bells dropped from their necks;
We will be in trouble upto our necks."

She arranges Kuravai dance

Matari spoke, allaying the fears
Of her daughter, "Do not be afraid
Before *Kannaki*, who most adheres
To perfection in women; be prepared
To enact *Kuravai* dance-drama:
Among others the one that Lord *Krishna*
Played with *Pinnai* of long eyen
Like spears, on the pollen-strewn
Green of cowherds' locality;
Then our cattle will escape calamity."

Chooses seven girls

She loves one who, unafraid of a black bull
In rage, subdues it; she wears a garland
Of honey-filled flowers.
One who controls a bull with a red patch
On its forehead, is alone fit to embrace
This girl who wears gold ornaments.
He who wins in strength and rides on
This young and strong bull has a right
To this girl who wears jasmine on her hair.
One who overcomes the strength
Of this white bull deserves the shoulders

Of this liana-like maiden.
He who masters this white bull
Deserves to embrace the tender breasts
Of this beautiful creeperlike girl.
He who conquers the still unconquered bull
Is the proper lover of this girl whose hair
Resembles laburnum flowers.
This maiden whose complexion is like a flower-bud
Can be won only by one who destroys
The proud anger of this white bull.
"Seven girls were chosen for the *Kuravai* dance,
Each of whom had groomed a bull;
And he who subdued it married the girl;
This is the tradition of our class or gens."

Assigns them parts

Matari the matron said; the continued,
"The parts I assign, you may play:
Kural as *Mayavan*, *Ili* as *Balaraman*,
Tuttam as *Pinnai* with companions four;
Tuttam and *Taran* by the side of *Mayavan*,
Ulai and *Vilari* near *Balaraman*, *Kaikkilai*
On the left of *Pinnai*, to the right of *Taram*
Vilari stand" and they began to dance the *kuravai*.
Strictly according to the traditional order.

Kuravai dance

The seven maids standing in that order,
Pinnai with a fresh garland of sacred basil,
Greeted him; "his whole cynosure
Was on *Pinnai*, forgetting his celestial
Spouse; he it was who in colossal pace
Found the earth wanting in space,"
Said *Matari*, her amazement growing apace.
The dancers stood in a circle to choose
The right musical forms; she whose
Role was *Mayavan* turned to *Pinnai*,
Her double, and said, "Let us in *mullai*
Tune sing the exploit of *Mayon*
When he destroyed the demon,
Who, as a Kuruntam tree, stood hidden.

Of them, the first singer began in a low key,
And *Ili* continued in even key;
Tuttam sang in a high pitch
Assisted by *Vilari* in a low pitch.

Mayavan's exploits

Confrere, dear *Mayon* knocked down the perfidious calf
As well as woodapples by throwing it as a short staff;
When he comes with the cattle and his flute, we melt and laugh.
With *Meru* as base, and serpent *Vācuki*

As rope, *Mayon* churned the ocean;
He comes amongst us as companion jolly
And thrills us with his lily flute like a magician.

Mayon destroyed the demon in our vicinity,
Shaped as a cactus tree; but in our company
He regales us with the music of true *mullai.*

We shall now sing of the attraction
Of *Mayon* and *Pinnai's* complexion.

Shall we praise *Mayon's* figure as he raced
To hide the clothes of her, whose slender waist
Seemed as if it would break that instant?
Or shall we praise her face and its loveliness,
Touched by eroticism and with distress
At Mayon's contrition over her embarrassment?

In the waters of *Yamuna* he had his will of her,
Yet became her slave in love; shall we flatter
Her beauty? or shall we say he had the cleverness
Of one to rob her of a virgin's fulness?

Of her clothes, by wily ways, he robbed her;
Of her bangles, by withholding love, he robbed her;
And in shame she, with her palms covered her face;
What shall we say of her face?
Her expression melted him,
And he made love; how shall we describe him?

Wearing fully opened flowers on her hair,
She stood on the right of him, of sea-blue colour;
Who hid the sun with his disc; she had on her
Left *Mayon's* elder brother who was fair
As moonlight; then *Naratar* adept in music
And in sculpture, plucked the strings to music.

Pinnai, her head having forward inclination,
Had *Mayon* on her right with blue complexion
Like that of peacock's neck; his brother *Baladevan*
Stood on her left, coloured white as flower;
Narata, playing on the strings, was time-keeper
To the movements of *Pinnai,* the dancer,

Mayon, his elder brother *Baladeva,*
Pinnai with arms filled with bangles,
Besides flowered shepherd girls
Sang and danced *Kuravai*
On the pollen-covered floor in *Tuvaraka;*
The flowers leaped with the dance rhythm;

The bangles jingled with the dance rhythm;
How enchanting the *kuravai*,
Let us all praise the god riding the *garuda!*

In praise of the Pantiya king

Sandal from *Potiyil* hill, corals from *korkai* sea,
And the ornament given by angry *Intira*,
The *Pantiyan* king wore on his breast;
It is said that he who wore *Indra's'* ornament last
Herded cattle and broke the laburnum tree.

In praise of the Cola king

Valavan of the walled city of *Pukar* ruled with success
A vast kingdom that extended upto *Imayam*,
On which he had carved his emblem;
They say it is *Tirumal* of the golden discus.

In praise of the Cera king

The *Cera* king of *Vanci* city dived into the sea
And killed the young white cedar tree;
It is said that he is the god who churned the ocean
With the mighty strength of a mountain.

Krishna and Mayon praised

In a past age the ocean was churned
By you, who are blue-complexioned,
Using *Imayam* as base and the serpent as rope;
How could *yacotara* with a common rope
Tie your hands? It's as great a marvel
As the lotus growing from your navel.
The heavenly hosts worship you as the first cause,
You gobbled the earth without being hungry;
And you yourself ate the butter stolen from the pantry;
You who wear a basil garland! these bewilder us.

As *Tirumal* the immortals worship you;
Measuring the universe in two steps, you
Brought light; as *Pantavas'* emissary
You went to the *Kauravas;* you killed the enemy
In the form of a man-lion; your actions
Are mysterious, and they confuse us.

In two steps the three worlds you crossed;
You walked sore-footed with your brother to the forest;
The fortress and Lanka's defences you laid waste;
What use our ears if they hear not heroic glory?
What use if they hear not *Tirumal's* glory?

He is the god of gods and miraculous;
From his navel rises a lotus:
Dark in complexion; his lips, eyes,
Hands and feet are roses;
Blessed are they who see him thus.

Lord *Krishna* defeated the evil designs of *Kancan;*

And he went to the *Kauravas* on behalf of the *Pantiyas*
On a peace mission, praised by men of every region,
And blessed by priests chanting the *vedas;*
If my tongue does not sing his praise, what use is it?
If it does not utter the word, *Narayana*, what use is it?

Let the gods we have praised in the music
Of *Kuravai* prevent all unkind
Happenings to our bovines; let the martial music
Of the king create panic in the mind
Of his enemies, and make him victorious;
As he had broken *Indra's* diadem such his prowess.

Canto 18 - Chain of Tragic Events

At the end of *Kuravai* dance the matron *Matari*
With an unsteady gait, wishing to pray
At *Vishnu* temple, carried incense, sandal,
Flowers and wreaths; suddenly she heard
A commotion in the village, and she turned
In that direction when she was met by a girl
Who had a most tragic news to tell.

Evil tidings

Seeing *Kannaki* before her, the girl said,
She wouldn't tell, she wouldn't tell;
And *Kannaki* begged that she should tell,
She implored; "my friend, I do not see
My lover, and my mind is distressed,
My heart burns more than the fire in the smithy;
This being so, what do your neighbours say, tell me."

Kannaki grieves

"Grief has passed beyond endurance:
It makes me shiver in this bright sunlit day,
My heart is wrung at my husband's absence,
Tell me, dear, what do the neighbours say?"

"My eyes wear vacant looks, my friend,
As my beloved has not returned;

The girl replies

I am afraid something evil has happened;
In this plight, tell me what they have heard,"
"He is the thief who stole noiselessly
The beautiful anklet from the king's palace;
On this, the watchmen of the city
Wearing bracelets for bravery
Killed your husband," said the girl.

Kannaki's reaction

Hearing this *Kannaki* burst into passion fierce,
And like the radiant moon hidden behind
Rain clouds, face down she fell to the ground;
Her eyes reddened and shed tears;
She cried out, 'my husband, my beloved'
In agony, she wept and swooned.
Men who have shared with their partners
Life's joys, die, fire consumes them,
But the living widows undergo tortures
Through fasting, penance and prayer;
Like them *Kannaki* could not destroy her being,
Though the world might blame her;
Though her husband was killed by the king
Unjustly, society may condemn him.

She said

Unnerved by the death of a partner
With a broad chest of fine vigour,
The widow purifies herself by holy baths
In a variety of bathing ghats,
And bemoans her loss; shall I follow
That example and suffer like my fellow,
Since the *Pantiyan* committed an injustice
In violation of the god of justice?
As one's most dear husband burns
In the funeral pyre, without ending
One's life in the same fire, but visiting
All holy places to wash away sins
Of one's own, and undergoing severe
Austerities, shall I forego honour
In this life, and suffer unceasingly,
When it is the *Pantiyan* who has committed folly?

Listen, all you cowherdesses
Who have come to perform *Kuravai*
Dance to avert impending calamity!
Listen, all shepherd women:

Appeals to the Sun god

'You who send burning rays know, I believe,
All that happens in this wide world,
That is by the billowy sea encircled;
Hence tell me if my husband is a thief'

The Sun god replies

And an aerial voice clearly says
'You damsel with dark carplike eyes,
Your husband is not a thief, and he
Who accused him is of this city,
That will be consumed by fire fully.'

Canto 19 - Song of Appeal to the People

The Sun god has spoken to *Kannaki*
Graced by a jewel round her shoulders;
And forthwith she rushed to the city
With one anklet that was hers;
Addressing the city women, she said:

Kannaki addresses the city women

"Hear me, chaste women of the place,
Ruled by a king without any sense of justice!
My endless grief seemed to end
When the gravest tragedy happened:
They killed my husband to get my anklet
Wihtout paying the price of it.
This is against all moral laws;
And I shall expose it before those
Virtuous women loved by their husbands;
I shall see him alive for certain,
And hear the truth from above;
If I do not so, curse me as one
Undeserving of my husband's love."

The citizens of thriving *Maturai* saw
Kannaki and heard her with pity and awe;

Their response

"What shall we say of the sceptre, gone awry,
Causing terrible agony to this lady?
The just rule of the southern king with a spotless
Name, of the king of kings, is married; why is this?
He whose reign has been good and benign
Is turned cruel and evil; of what is this sign?
Why has the new divinity, holding an anklet
In her hand appeared in our midst?
This lady of godly power, with beautiful eyes,
Moans and cries; what is in store for us?"

With words of consolation and sympathy

The citizens, who spared not their sovereign
For his faults, showed the dead body to *Kannaki*
The Sun hid himself behind the mountain,
Unwilling to see her in this pitiable condition;

They show her the dead body of Kovalan

She was a golden liana with flowers fallen;
Her lot she bemoaned in loud lamentation,
That filled the long night and the short even.
She held him to her bosom, wearing his flower wreath;
His whole body drenched in blood, he lay unaware
Of her presence, which intensely grieved her,
And of her misery at his dusty death.
The world might say her deeds in her former birth
Were responsible for his unjust murder.

Kannaki cries out

All alone in this spiritless evening
Before my tearful eyes, your comely chest
Instead of flowers adorning,
Lies in the dust. Won't society, without doubt,
Say that my former deeds brought this about,
Through the king's mistake, and blame me?

"Are there women of chastity here? Are there?
Are there women who could bear
Their husband's fate, cruel as this?
Are there wise men here? Are there?
Men who would bring up orphans, are there?
Does God dwell here? Does God dwell here?
The king in this city denied justice
By an act of the sharp sword: does God dwell here?"

Speaking in the midst of tears, she pressed
Against her body her husband's golden chest;
He rose up, and wiping her tears, said:

Kovalan says to Kannaki

'Your beautiful moonlike face is red
With weeping;' she fell to the ground clasping
With bangled arms his feet, worthy
Of worship; leaving behind his body,
He joined the waiting angels saying:
'My dear, with collyriumed and soft eyes,
Stay back,' he flew to paradise.

Kannaki takes a resolve

"Has it all been a dream or reality?
Have I been under the spell of a deity?
How shall I resolve what is other worldly
Even our talk has been full of fancy;
So, till my wrath is appeased,
To go to my lord I am not pleased;
And I shall face the evil king indeed,
To force and answer for his misdeed."

So speaking she stood up and thought
Of her bad dream, her long darting eyes
Filling with tears; again she thought;
Then, wiping the tears, she marched to the palace.

Canto 20 - Appeal to the King's Tribunal

The Pantiya Queen sees in a dream

"Sceptre and sway tottered,
The tongue of plaint-bell clamoured,
Earth's eight compass-points quaked,
All the light darkness slaked,
A monstrous rainbow filled the night,
Shooting stars lit the day more bright;"
Such horrid visions I saw.

She decides to inform the king

"Inflexible sceptre and dominion immaculate
Tumbled and fell to red dust;
The bell at the king's castle-gate
Rang sharp, and my heart burst;
Night's rainbow and day's meteor
Life's certainties endanger;
Dreams like these presage disaster,
These to the king I shall utter."

A suite of maids waited on the queen
With looking-glasses, jewels, ornaments,
Silver caskets, cotton and silk garments,
White and coloured unguents,
Garlands, incense, and perfumes;

She tells the king her dream

Hunchbacks, dwarfs, and mutes too
Danced attendance; grey-haired dames
Invoked blessings on the royal mistress
A bevy of damsels warbled her praises;
To the king's chamber the queen hurried,
And told the fearful dreams of the night.

Kannaki speaks to the palace guard

"O you guard, you guard at the gate!
You porter to a senseless, unjust, ignoble king!
Tell your master of one importunate
Clutching one of a pair of anklets,

And she cruelly widowed and desolate."

The guard informs the king

The guard thus to the king spoke:
"Long live the king of *Korkai!*
Long live the lord of *Potiyil* hills!
Glory to *Celiyan:* Glory to the lord of the south!
Long live the blameless *Pantiyan!*
She is not *Korravai* the goddess of the terrible lance
Who stood on the buffalo monster's head
And severed it from the body that poured
An endless stream of blood;
Nor the youngest of the Seven virgins,
Nor the one for whom Lord *Civa* danced;
Nor the goddess who dwells in fearsome forests,
Nor the one who split the head of fierce *Taruka;*
But a figure determined and wrathful,
Holding a skilfully wrought gold anklet,
And, newly widowed, waits outside."

The king speaks to the visitor Kannaki

She came escorted, as ordered by the king.
"Young lady with tearful eyes, who are you,
And what plaint do you bring?"
"Ignorant king, hearken to me:

Kannaki speaks of the Cola king's justice

I belong to no mean city in a kingdom,
Whose kings are reputed for acts of justice,
That angels themselves admired;
Once it was a dove that got even justice,
Another time to redress the wrong done to a cow,
The king ordered his only son to die under chariot-wheels;
The city is named *Pukar* in the *Cola* kingdom.
A noble merchant of that city
Came here to sell a pair of anklets;
And he was done to death on your sentence;
He is my wedded lord, my name is *Kannaki.*"

"Beautiful lady, it is not unjust
To kill a thief: it's the king's law."
To this, she of shining ornaments, replied,

The Pantiya king reply

"Oh king, yours has been a rash judgment,
My gold anklets contain precious gems."
"Sweet-voiced lady, you have spoken fair,
The queen's anklets contain rare pearls."

'Let the anklet be brought.' he said.
Kannaki broke the anklet -- that she used to wear --
And behold! a gem it was that flew
And hit the king on his lips, and fell afar.

At sight of this, the sceptre and parasol went crooked;
The king moaned: "Alas, I am undone, having acted

The king dies

On the goldsmith's accusation. Am I a true king?
I am the guilty one; the famed justice of *Pantiyan* king
Is now tarnished. Let my life end."
And he fell down dead.

The queen dies too

Overwhelmed by the turn of events, the queen
Intoned: 'To a virtuous woman the world becomes mean
On the decease of her lord.' Holding fast
To the king's feet, she prayed and breathed her last.

"Righteousness itself kills those who forsake it,"
This saying by the wise is proved to the hilt.
You, the adored partner of the erring king!
See what a victim of unrighteousness can bring!"

Tears flowed from eyes dark as bluebells,
The lone anklet was held aloft in the right hand,
The living body was bereft of youthful animation,
Locks of hair thick as forest lay dishevelled;
Seeing this the guardian spirit of *Kutal* city
Blamed himself for the poignant tragedy;
His body lay rigid, life having departed.

The Lord of Vaikai breathes his last

The sight of the dust-stained body, disordered hair,
The hand holding on to an anklet, and tearful eyes
Unnerved the Lord of *Vaikai* river;
The lady's burning words sucked his life in a trice.

Canto 21 - The Great Curse

Kannaki speaks of seven chaste women of Colanatu

"Noble consort to a mighty king! ruthless
Me, acting in ignorance; 'Tis nature's law:
To evil-doers comes swift nemesis,
As night follows day; this you saw.

"Of Yore it is said of a wife virtuous,
Falsely accused of unchastity,
That fire and flora came as witness
To declare on oath her purity.

On the banks of *Ponni* a lady of divine chastity
Stood by an image of sand symbolizing her husband;
And the waters merely rolled round the figure of sanctity,
Awed by the devotion of one with crinkled venus mound.

Another lady fabled for chastity,
King *Karikalvalavan's* daughter,
And married to the prince of *Vanci* city,
Seeing her lord was to meet a watery grave
Having been swept to the sea by a flooded river,
Called to him as mighty-shouldered and brave;
Such a heart -- rending cry she uttered
That the sea to her arms restored
The prince; and like a flowering vine
She held him fast with a joy divine.

Still another waited, in form petrified
In a flowery grove by the seaside,
Gazing at each returning bark
Till her husband did disembark.
Finding her sister's child fallen into a well,
Dropped her own child there as well,
This lady chaste with eyes like spear;
The power of her virtue saved the pair.

Seeing a stranger look at her carnally,
A pure one wished her fair face turn ugly;
And so it was till her husband's return
A row of red gems her loins did adorn.

Howsoever good be a women's brain
The seers hold it to be vain;
This truth never did I think or act on.
As a young girl playing in the dry river-bed,
Thoughtless, I promised my boon-companion
That her son could my daughter wed,
Should we in future beget children to our wish;
So we did, and she came the vow to accomplish.
Having no dower to give I was in distress;
My daughter swiftly donned a new dress,
Knotted her hair, and became a bride
Of the chosen youth, to save my pride.

"My city boasts of many such noble dames;
Born to this tradition I shan't lay down my head
Unlike you, till *Maturai*, like its king, lies dead."
In high wrath these words she proclaims.

Kannaki in high wrath

"You men and women of the tall residences,
You gods above, and you holy men, hear!

curses the city

Since it is the city of him who wronged my dear,
I cursed, being guiltless." -- these her utterances

She of shining ornaments circled
The city thrice, tore her left breast apart,
And in a half dizzy state hurled
It with an oath in the fragrant mart.

Before her appeared the angel of fire,
His complexion dark blue, his red hair
Long and matted, and teeth white as milk,
His form that of a brahmin's ilk.

The angel of fire speaks to Kannaki

"Paragon of chastity! It was divine destiny
That swiftly I should burn aown this city
On the very day you were sinned against;
Whom would you like to exempt from holocaust?"

Kannaki answers

"Brahmins, chaste women, aged men,
Sacred cows, and innocent children --
Let these escape thy terrible ire;
Let all the evil ones perish in fire."

No sooner were these words spoken
Than smoke and fire did darken
The city, famed for its royal chariot;
And it rained death, obeying the lady's fiat.

Epilogue

The city's god and angels, helpless
To save the king, his queen, his palace,
His bowmen, his horses and elephants,
Fled in fear to far regions.

Canto 22 - The City in Flames

As directed, the fire-god came out in full force
The guardian spirits sat within closed doors;
As if to straighten the sceptre that was bent,
The great king, warlike *Celiyan* died of shame;

And the chaste queen died along with him;
Nobody outside knew what had happened.

The city burns

The priests, the scribes, the revenue officers,
Accountants, judges, and ministers,
Besides men and women retainers
Remained still like painted figures.

Cavalrymen, elephant mahouts, charioteers,
Were taken by surprise; so were the soldiers
To see the palace gates on fire,
And were preparing to face it square.

The first spirit

The leading guardian spirit
Had the complexion of moonlight,
And wore a chain of pure corals;
He was punctilious in his rituals.
He wanted to leave *Kutal*.
The second spirit was red in complexion,

The second spirit

And had in his hand the war drum,
White parasol, long flag, fur of deer,
Elephant hook, strong spear,
And stout rope; having subdued
All the kings, he became master of the world;
A just ruler, he banished from the world
All crimes; he too was for departure.

The third spirit

The third spirit was golden in colour,
And had all the insignia except the spear
Of the second spirit; he guarded the trader,
And the farmer; hence he carried a pair
Of scales and a ploughshare;
Like the god who had on his hair
The crescent, he was very fair.

The fourth spirit

The fourth was of the colour of diamond pure;
Dressed in brocade, he had the culture
Of a dancer, and of music he was a master;

All of them leave Maturai

Of the spirits what got sacrifices he was the leader;
He too wished not to stay there any longer.

The guardian spirits of Maturai speak

"We knew that fire would consume the land
When the king acted unjustly; so out of this land
We go," they stated, and they departed
In different directions; she was appeased
At the cost of her left breast.

Like the burning of the forest long ago,
The car streets with the flag of the deity,

The confla-gration

The grocery bazaar, the four quarters of the city,
That were well-defined -- at these fire had a go;

But where vice lived, furious burned the fire.
The milking cows and their calves sought safety
At the shepherds' quarters where virtue tenants;
The strong bulls, the female elephants,
And the race horses ran out of the city.

The young lovers broke off love-making,
As if love, like liquor, soon lost meaning;
The breasts fresh, erect and defiant;
The coral chain now lay quiescent
That used to make the nipples vibrant;
Their big eyes, collyrium painted; their hair
Fragrant with blossoms where honey was in store,
And pollen dust lay in a scatter.

Matrons with dark patches on their mons veneris
Were startled from their sleep on soft mattresses
By the side of lisping and tottering children
Who nestled to the sides of grey-haired women.

Good matrons, glad to welcome the guest,
Were happy to say, "This chaste lady,
Having lost her jewel-chested lord,
Won her case with the king by her anklet,
And burned the city by her breast;
She was not cruel," and praised the fire-god.

The courtesans

The courtesans, skilled in sixtyfour arts
Lamented the loss of their marts;
And the dance stage besides fellow artists.
They exclaimed; "Who is she, whose daughter,
And of what country that she should set fire
To this city because her husband was killed here
Unjustly, she proved with the anklet of hers."
In temples, evening festival, rites of fire, prayers,
Vedic chant; in homes, lighting lamps and prayers;
In the city, beating of drums -- all these ceased.

The aimless wandering of Kannaki through Maturai

Grieved at being parted from her husband,
Kannaki sighed like a furnace, and
She would wander the streets aimlessly, or pause
At cross streets; from there she would pass;
Sometimes she stood still in a stunned
State; before this heroic lady did appear
The deity of *Maturapati*, who couldn't
Stand the intense heat everywhere.

Epilogue

The victories of *Lakshmi*, *Sarasvati*, and *Parvati*
Together were equivalent to that of *Kannaki*, looking
Fearsome, especially when one breast was missing;
Before her appeared goddess *Maturapati*.

Canto 23 - Tying up the Knots

Description of Maturapati

The patron goddess of the *Pantiya* dynasty
Had a radiant face, a crescent on her hair,
A rosy mouth with an exposed molar,
Teeth like moonlight, eyes blue like lily,
A lotus on her left hand, and a hatchet
In the other, a ring on her right leg,
And an anklet on her left leg;
The *Pantiya* kingdom was bounded by rivulet
Kumari in the south, and *Imayam* in the north;
Near *Korkai* the capital, lay *Potiyil* of great worth.
The goddess, abashed by *Kannaki's* stance --
Wrathful and heroic, with one breast plucked --
Stood behind and said, 'Listen to my grievance';

Kannaki questions Maturapati

'Who are you that stand behind me?', asked
Kannaki, and continued, 'Don't you know
My tragedy and my suffering enow?'.

The patron goddess Maturapati answers

You lovely lady with fine jewels, well
I know how much you have suffered;
My name is *Maturapati* of *Kutal*
I too have grieved for what occurred;
Hear me with patience and sympathy,
Learning the cause of my misery;
My friend, this is how the sins of former
Birth descended on the *Pantiyan* ruler;
Your husband's fate is also similar,
That too I shall make clear.
Except the vedic chant he heard not
The sound of the bell, meant for complaint;
His own citizens accused him not
Of cruelty, of which enemy kings complained.

Hear more of it; beautiful women
And their charming smiles may cause heat

Of passion in youth, as an elephant's heat,
And may run uncontrolled by education,
That is, the mahout, but cultured men
Will harm not their family relation.
During his nightly rounds to prevent any injustice
The king knocked at *Kirantai's* house.
To his shock he overheard the words of the lady
Accusing her husband, "You left me in fear and pain,

The glory of Pantiya King

Assuring me that the king would protect me;
If so, will this indignity happen?"
The king realising the guilt as his own,
Cut off his hand, that had broken the crown
Of *Indra's* such is his tradition.

For the *Colas*, justice has been the supreme principle;
To save a dove one *Cola* king gave his own flesh;
Another *Cola* sacrificed the flesh of his flesh
For the sake of satisfying a cow in trouble;
Food was in plenty there, and people gave it freely;
There was once a brahmin by name *Paracaran*
In *Colanatu*, who excelled in learning and tradition;
Having heard of the generosity of the *Cera* king,
Whose ancestor had fed the *Pantavas*
During their war with *Kauravas*
And who was equally reputed in fighting,
He journeyed through areas of wild nature;
Crossing *Potiyil* hills, high and holy;
He met a *guru* who taught him the sole nature
Of the twice-born, the rites of triple-fire ceremony,
The key to the four *vedas*, the great penances
Numbering five, and the six functions of brahmins;
In these he became so perfect a model
That he won many a religious disputation,
Acquiring many an enviable laurel,
Besides earning a high reputation.
On his way back he took rest in an assembly hall
In the village of *Tirutankal*, keeping
His staff, footwear, bowl, and parcel to one side only,
And sang the praises of the *Cera* king.
Young children with lisping words and unsteady
Steps gathered round the stranger innocently;
He spoke to them these words: "Dear boys, I'll tell
You how to recite the *vedas*, and if you do well
I'll give presents;" one *Dakshinamurthy*
A mere child, with red mouth, milk-frothy,
Son of *Vartikan*, recited the *vedas* flawlessly.

And *Paracaran* congratulated him sincerely,
Gave him a costly sacred thread and jewelry,

Like ear-rings and bracelets. Out of jealousy
The neighbours accused the innocent father and son
Of stealing the king's jewels and had them put in prison.

At this *Vartikan's* wife, *Kartikai*, swooned,

Korravai temple doors closed

Sighed and wept, rolled on the ground
Got wild; on seeing this, goddess *Aiyai*
Shut her carved temple doors in rage.

The cause of *Aiyai's* anger was investigated;
The king found *Vartikan* innocent and acquitted
Him at once, asking him to pardon those who had acted
In ignorance; *Tirtankal* and *Vayalur* were high
Gifts of the king to *Vartikan* and *Kartikai*;
The earth goddess, restored to the king's bosom, was happy.

Resounding in every nook and corner of *Kutal* city,
The doors of *Aiyai's* temple opened simultaneously.

Public announcement

Let all the prisoners free; and criminala be forgiven
Let him who finds treasure enjoy it;
Let him who earns wealth use it;
By drum-beat the king made this proclamation;
The same king has done injustice to you;
How it happened I shall tell you.

Old prediction

Young lady with tinkling bracelets, it's a theory
That says, "In the month of *Ati*, eight days
After the full moon on Friday, when the Pleiades
And Aries are in the ascendant, *Maturai* city
And its ruler will meet with calamity."

Kingdoms *Cinkapuram* and *Kapilapuram*
In the garden-filled country of *Kalinkam*
Were ruled by two cousins, *Vacu* and *Kumaran*;

Kovalan and Kannaki's previous lives recalled

Rich fields dotted the land of *Cinkapuram*,
And bamboo forests characterised *Kapalipuram*,
As the rulers were at war, they put a ban
On foreigners visiting their capitals;
A rich merchant and his wife of alien origin
Entered *Cinkapuram* to sell their jewels;
The merchant's name was *Cankaman*
Meantime, *Paratan* who was in *Vacu's* pay,
Who believed not in any non-violent religion,
Denounced *Cankaman* as an enemy spy,
And had him led into execution;
"*Paratan* was *Kovalan* in his previous existence,
You were his wife; *Cankaman's* wife *Nili*
Overwhelmed by the terrible violence,
Wailed, and filled with fury,
Accused the king of injustice, and shouted

To the people that her husband was innocent;
After fourteen days of prayer, she mounted
The top of a hill saying she had the presentiment
Of meeting her husband in the arch of heaven;
'Let my enemies suffer similarly' was her curse
Before she fell down to be absorbed in heaven;
So you two are the victims of the curse.
Lady of luxuriant hair, this is the truth in fact;
When the fruit of evil begins to take place
Your good deeds do not counteract;
You shall join your husband fourteen days
Hence, not in earthly but divine aspect."

'Before I see you, my husband, my dearest,
I will not sit or stand or take rest;'

Kannaki takes a vow

So saying, *Kannaki* broke her bracelets of gold
At the entrance to the temple of *Korravai;*
My husband and I entered *Maturai* city
From the eastern side, and now with untold misery,
I all alone, shall leave this city
By the doors that in the opposite side lie.
Night and day *Vaikai* flows with rippling sound;
On its banks *Kannaki* walked on unmindful
Of the rough passage, and climbed the hill
Of *Muruka,* who had parted the sea to rend
The chest of *Kiravuncam* hill,
And with his shining spear defeated the angels evil.
Standing beneath a kino branch she said indeed
She had committed many an evil deed;
After fourteen days, in answer to her prayer
Indra and his heavenly hosts did appear
Along with *Kovalan;* they showered on her
Praises and unfading flowers, and with her
He left in his aerial vehicle for his sphere.

Epilogue

An ornament here on earth to chaste women,
Kannaki became the guest of angelic women;
Hence, she who does obeisance not to the gods,
But to her husband solely is worshipped by gods.

Of the three crowned heads of Tamilnatu,
Every ruler of the *Pantiya* dynasty excelled
In war, peace, and power; these are reflected
In the traditions hoary of *Maturai,* the capital.

The grand festivals celebrated, the visit
Of divine beings, the happiness of the people,
The increasing production of food stuffs,
The enrichment of the land by river *Vaikai,*
The regularity of rainfall that never failed,
The two kinds of popular folk dances,

And other virtues not mentioned here,
All these are testimonies to the fact.

The martial victories of the present king
Netunceliyan over the Aryan kings
As well as over the other Tamil kings,
Made him the ruler of the whole of Tamilnatu.

He nobly breathed his last in the climax
Of his career while sitting on the throne;
His example was followed by his consort also.
Thus *Maturai kantam* comes to and end.

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Canto 24 - *Kuravai* Dance

One of the Kurava women speaks

"From our cornfields we scare sparrows and parrots away,
In cascades and pools we gambol and play;
Under the shade of Kino you look pretty like a creeper;
Yet strange, with only one breast, tell us who you are."

Kannaki replies

"Gay *Maturai* and its rule fell to ruin, as fate decreed;
Losing my husband there, I an evil-doer, left the place,"

At this the *Kurava* women were filled with wonder;
With bangled arms raised, they worshipped her;
At the same time, heavenly beings did shower
Flowers, and took her away in dear company.
"A deity like this is unknown in our community.

The leader to her tribe

Tribesmen all, hold her as your tribal deity;
In the valley below the hill, drenched with brilliant
Waterfalls, under the shade of fragrant
Kino, instal her as your greatest deity."

"Beat the drums, big and small;
Blow the horn and ring the bell;
Sing our war-song, and let fragrance
Spread; offer flowers; around the territory
Build walls; sing hymns of reverence;
Let a floral medley be the offertory.
All this perform to the single-breasted lady,
So our hill may flourish increasingly."

Kurava maid to her friend

Jewelled lady, look there, look here!
How colourful the waterfalls are!
Like the rainbow as if the powder

Of collyrium, orpiment, and cinnabar
Lies scattered! in the perfumed atmosphere
Night and day they sound in a subdued manner.
Let us go, my friend, and revel in the cascade,
Falling in the misty region in the shade.

The girl confides in her friend

Falsely telling us to believe his words of love,
He took pleasure of us, forgetting us now.
Let us bathe in the waterfalls without anger,
Though the waters start from the hill of the lover.
When other maidens bathe here, we are in pain:
Why are we so, my friend! explain.
The fresh water here carried golden pollen
From the lover's hill; yet I find no reason
To hate it; when others bathe here
My friend, I cannot bear!
No cause for quarrel I find in the fresh water
That flows in the stream, yet some other
Persons enjoying their bath in this stream,
Causes me pain; why so, friend of my bosom?

Friend, we have gambolled in the fresh water
Till our collyriumed eyes turned red;
Hereafter, let us sing and dance in honour
Of *Murukan*, whose spear pierced the demon dead,
Who had stood as a tall tree in mid-sea.

They sing and dance

It was God *Muruka's* bright spear
With its leaf-shaped head that split
The tall tree in mid-sea, and killed
The demon in time past, though fair
Centil, Cenkotu and *Venkunru*
Remain his permanent home.
Six fair faces and twelve arms
Are uniquely his; the spear his sole arms;
It was what destroyed the mighty demons;
He rode on a peacock, praised by heavens.

Murugan's birth

Six mothers in *Caravana* bedchamber
Suckled him; and it was his spear
That tore the chest of *Avunar*
And split the hill that does a bird's name bear.

She continues

Bangled friend, how laughable it is, as mother
Invokes *Velan* of *Katampa* flowers to cure
My sickness, not knowing it is caused by the master
Of the cool hill, that grows pepper.

Good friend of choice bangles! indeed it is ridiculous
If *Velan* comes to cure my love sickness,

Caused by the mountain chief; he is crazy;
More so my god, who split the hill, were he to try.

Dear friend with armful of bangles! it's funny of *Velan*
To cure the sickness over the chief of the aromatic mountain;
Velan is a fool; a greater fool is *Murukan,*
Son of *Civa,* who sits under a banyan.

Dear friend with lovely bangles! it is risible
For *Velan* to cure my sickness of love for the chieftain;
More foolish would be for the benign *Murukan*
To inspire the medium to attempt the impossible.

Velan's spirit, entering the body of the medium
Will dance as if in delirium;
Murukan, son of *Civa* of the banyan tree,
Will be present with his sweet heart, *Valli;*
And I would entreat my god to make
the mountain chief wed me, and no mistake.

Son of the god abiding in *Imayam!* I pray to your love
Whose feet are, as *Acoka* shoots, tender
Who has a crescent forehead, peacock's nature,
And is the hill-tribe's modest daughter,
To grant my wish to wed my lover, and not a stranger.

Son of the mountain daughter! at your feet I pray
As you have ennobled the tribal people, by having wed
One of them, a girl with crescent forehead;
So help me marry my mountain lover publicly.

"She of the hill tribe is of my clan! She and you,
my gods,
Six faced and unique! I pray at your feet:
As your kinswoman, I touch your pair of feet;
Bless me and prevent my wedding to a wrong lord."

"The mountain chief, wearing garlands scented,
Having overheard the song, moved away when I greeted,
By touching his feet, and I stood before him;
My friend, listen to the words I spoke to him."

"With spear in hand, you wear *Katampa* flowers;
You visit the village for a maiden's sake;
You come without six faces, without your peacock,
Without your dear love, or your brawny shoulders;
None will take you for a god who accepts sacrifices;
Are the people of this small village dunces?."

Having listened to my words of pain and misery,

He, the master of broad acres, turned back sorrowfully;
It looked as if he would soon return to marry me.
With her breast she burned *Maturai* city;
And the divine beings worshipped her for chastity;
They showed her husband to her; about her purity
We shall sing with complete sincerity.

Come, let us sing; come, let us sing, my friend.
Come, let us sing; come, let us sing, my friend!
She burned *Kutal* and many a tower there,
To punish a tyrant; let us sing in her honour;
When we praise her who burnt the city
Let us plead that the mountain chief marry me.
Women of chastity worship her for her godhead;
Her forelap is like a cobrahead;
She is in our land; showing her husband to her,
The heavenly beings never cease to praise her.

Under a flowery kino in a forest stood a lady pure,
Worshipped by angels; she was passion free;
With her lord she joined the angelic choir;
We sing her praises, though she may not appear here;
In doing so, the village does more godliness acquire;
It is a blessed village, as every girl marries her lover.

"Our true songs and the dance of *Kuravai*
Moved the lover to the intimacy of wedding;
The western king ruled *Imayam* and *Kolli*,
And enjoyed many victories; long live our king!"

Canto 25 - The Beatific Vision

The Cera King in all his glory,

The *Cera* king of heroic sword did subdue
Not only the island kingdom of *Katampa* trees,
But all the land upto *Imayam*, on which the figure
Of a bow he carved, being his coat-armour.
Relaxing in his courtyard, cooled by water,
With *Venmal* his queen, and his younger brother,

He spoke of visiting the hill area, where
The waterfalls continuously set up a roar
Like drumbeat; and misty clouds all over
Float; all of them left with many an attendant,
The precincts of *Vanci* in high excitement.

Towards the mountain resort

The king rode on an elephant of great power,
Like the god whose weapon is the spear;
There were rivers with islands, parks and pools,
Besides drama-stages and halls,
Fit place for God's dalliance with angels.
The king alighted with his followers
On the bank of *Periyar* river, strewn with flowers
From Kino, laburnum, laurel and sandal;
Bees buzzed all round, and the river crossed a tall
Mountain like the garland on the chest of *Tirumal*.

The hills resound to various noises

Many kinds of sounds were heard,
Like the songs of *Kuravai* of tribal women,
Of men possessed by god *Velan*,
Of women husking corn, of maidens
Shooing birds, shouts of men breaking
Beehives, the roar of waterfalls, resembling
Drum beat, of elephant trappers,
Of mahouts, of animal-catchers;
These mingled with the sound of army marching.

Presents to their king by the hill-tribes

In the outer courtyards of the palace, lay in confusion
Piles of gifts from many a tributary king,
Who waited for days for audience with the *Cera* king;
The tribals also brought offerings to their sovereign
Like ivory, sandalwood, cardamon, pepper,
Eyeshadow, vermilion, fans of white fur,
Aromatic bark, orpiment, arrow-root flour,
Millets, coconuts, mangoes, garland of leaves,
Breadfruit, sugarcane, palm leaves,
Besides arecanuts, bananas, flowering plants,
Deer of many kinds, cubs of lions and tigers,
Peacocks,monkeys, mongoose, bears,
Chickens, wild cats, parrots and baby-elephants.

The tribals speak to the Cera king

"We serve you for ever; long live your sceptre!
Under a wild kino tree stood a lady
With one breast, in utter desolation;
She ascended to heaven with her lord and master,
With heavenly beings as adorers.
Of what country, or whose daughter was she,
Though of this land, we could not imagine.
May you live for a million years!"

Heart filled with gladness at the *Cera* kingship,
And pleased almost to the extent of hero worship,
Cattanar, the learned teacher of sweet Tamil,

Cattanar says

Said, I shall tell you everything that befell
That beautiful lady; listen, O king
With unmatched ability and daring!

Because of the ill-fated anklet,
This bangled lady's husband met his end;
Before the king of great military might
This lady with the anklet argued her right;
Breaking the anklet before the *Pantiya* queen
This lady of chastity turned an avenging queen;
'Lady of glossy hair, you shall rue this.'
She plucked out her young breast and burned the metropolis.
The southern king fainted on the royal seat,
At which the queen stroked his tender feet,
Thinking that the widow's plight was too painful to bear
Oblivious of the vengeful words, she went on calmly,
Thinking only of her lord's condition, and really
Wishing to be with her lord; she died there
As if her spirit went in search of his.

'The misrule of a proud king comes to nought'
This she has proved, and as if to drive it home,
She visits your land all alone, with not
A thought of returning to her own home."
Thus telling the whole story without omissions,
The poet wished the king to rule for aeons.
Pained by the fate of the southern crowned head,
The *Cera* king accordingly responded;

The Cera King replies

"Ere the world hears and condemns the unjust act,
Of a king like me, the news of his death would counteract
The evil, brought about by fate; it would straighten
The sceptre that has been bent and got uneven;
If it doesn't rain, people will greatly fear;
If any living being suffers, it results in fear;
To function as a true king to the people is onerous;
It could never be meritorious."
Thus *Ceran* replied to *Cattanar* who boldly
Narrated the story of tragic suffering and misery.

The Cera king asks his consort

"Between her, who died with her lord,
And the other, who came with grief and anger,
Tell me, bright-browed queen, who is better?"
The great lady, thus addressed, answered:
"She who died seeing her darling's hardship,
Will enjoy, with him, heavenly joys;
That being so, let us adore and worship
This goddess of chastity, come among us."

The king being of the same opinion,
Looked at the pundits for approbation.

The Pundits' advice

"Both *Potiyil* with its undying tradition,
And *Imayam*, bearing the bow's impression,
Could provide granite stones to fashion
Holy images; their immersion
In the rivers of Ganges and *Kaviri*.
Would assure sacredness and purity."

The King answers

"For a descendant of a warlike family,
With a brave sword, taking a piece of granite
From *Potiyil*, and dipping it in *Kaviri*,
With its ancient waters would be of no merit."

Righteous indignation of the king

With twice-born *rishis* of knotted red tresses,
Wet clothes, holy thread, and the riches
Of three fires, if the king of *Imayam* refuses
To spare a stone for the idol of a goddess
Of chastity, who attained heaven as a young woman,
I shall certainly defeat him in open aggression.

The king speaks

I shall prove to him the instability of the human body;
In battle I shall my cause successfully vindicate;
Or I shall wrest from him as Lord *Civa* wrested *Parvati*,
And see to it that my enemies share the fate
Of those who opposed my march northwards;
I shall destroy the trees on *Imayam* that grow flowers,
Mantara and kino; for those kings shall not be victors;
The cool, sun-kissed flowers I shall wear.

Takes a decision

Begin the celebration of the parasol, the sceptre,
The king's rule, the victories that arouse wonder,
The great feast, and the tribute to the conqueror.
Wearing a garland of palmyra flowers,
To the deafening applause of the soldiers,
Let the invincible sword wear
The flowers due to a victor.
May you reign for countless years,
Cried *Villavankotai*, and added:
Kings like you have become your enemies,

Villavankotai speaks of the heroism of the king

And from the battle field, the *Konkars*
Fled, leaving their banners
Of the tiger and the fish; the news
Soon spread to the far corners.

Where the *Konkars*, *Kalinkars*, *Karunatars*,
Venkalars, *Kankars*, and *Kattiyars*
Joined hands with the northern *Ariyars*,
And fought against your Tamil soldiers,
Fiercely you hunted their elephants;

It was for me an unforgettable experience.

The day our divine lady we did immerse
In the Ganges of swift-flowing waters,
Alone you faced the thousand Aryan kings
In the field of battle, with a fierceness
That no words can describe; like the ruthless
God of death athirst for the lives of human beings.

"Should you desire the whole sea-girt country
To be Tamil land, it can be done easily;
Since you marched to *Imayam* to get a stone
For a sacred idol, let our foes atone,
And unfurl the Tamil banner
Of a bow, a fish, and a tiger."

Alumpil Vel says

The *Navalan* chiefs have eager spies in *Vanci*,
Who post news of us to their masters promptly,
Masters who have elephants well-decorated;
So let us go back, *Alumpil Vel* suggested.

The king of the ever-victorious army
Agreeing, they returned to *Vanci*,
Tributes adding to its luxury;
"Long live our king, our majesty,
May he rule in perpetuity."

"Our king will take a stone from famed *Imayam*,
That bears the sign of the bow on its brow;
Hence you kings of the north, bend your brow
To our king, and pay tributes handsome;
If so, hear his exploits in the island kingdom
Of *Katampu*, and the way he carved
His insignia of a bow on *Imayam*,
And live in peace, unperturbed.
If not, you would better renounce
Your wife and family to do penance."
Their eminently brave king,
Who wore the heroic anklet gets every blessing.
The drums on the back of the royal elephant,
That came round the city, sounded triumphant.

Canto 26 - Expedition to the Himalayas

The public announcement was over; the king
Sat on his ancient throne, shaped like a lion;
The chief adviser, all the ministers,
The soothsayer, and the army commanders
Together wished long life to the king;
Then they heard him with attention,
As he gave the details of his mission.

Kuttuvan explains

The sages from the Himalayas reported to me
In this very place, in your hearing,
The insult hurled at us by the northern kings;
To brook this is a shame to kings like me.

Bring we shall a stone, a god's idol to fashion,
Carried on the crowned heads of Aryan region;
I shall fight with the heroic anklet on,
And make my enemies quake with fear;
With an idle sword if I were to return
Let my people curse me as an unjust ruler."

"Except the kings with garlands of *atti*,
Those with wreaths of margosa flowers,
And the others who surrender, enjoy your generosity;
Are there any to confront your wrath?
Conqueror of *Imayam!* the Northerners insult
You not; hence give up your wrath."
Thus spoke the chief adviser; then the soothsayer,
Learned in the star power, the planets
And the zodiac rose up and said;
"Warlike king, may you live long! Time is right
For you to start; all the kings of the earth
Will submit to you;" the king then had
The shining sword and the parasol white

The King starts his journey north

Placed pointing to the north
The serpent that carried the earth trembled
At the noise of the soldiery; the wardrums swelled;
Night's darkness bright lamps dispelled;
The armies, thick as close-knit creepers,
The big five, and the eight kinds of officers,
The priests dear to the king, master of elephants,
The time-keepers, moral teachers, and magicians,
Shouted, "Hail, *Cera* King;" the royal elephant
Bearing the fell sword, and the white parasol
Was taken to the outside of the temple wall;
Finally entering the audience hall, the king donned

Vanci and palmyra flowers in a garland.

Feasting the army chiefs of great worth,
The *Cera* king of the sharp-edged sword,
Wore a wreath of *Vanci* flowers on his head,
And prepared himself for the expedition to the north.

The morning drum sounded as if to prompt
The subject kings to pay their tribute;
The *Cera* king bent down his head in humility
And touched the feet of Lord *Civa*, the Almighty

Prays to God Civa

Who had the crescent moon in his knotted locks;
He went round the temple, and the fumes
From the ceremony of fire faded the blooms;
And he climbed to his seat on the elephant's back.

To God Vishnu

Giving *Kuttuvan* of the west coast the *Prasad*
From the temple of *Vishnu* in Trivandrum,
Where the god lay in yogic ecstasy,
Devotees prayed for *Kuttuvan's* victory;
As already his head carried *Civa's* feet.
Vishnu prasad gained on his jewelled shoulders a seat.
In all theatres the women artistes with folded hands
Greeted the king, Victorious monarch! On the tall
Front of your royal elephant appears
The garland of siris, white nettle, and palmyra flowers;
And you steal, seated under the white parasol,
Our bracelets, as you have bewitched our hearts."

Poets, bards, and eulogists wished the king victory;
Officers of the cavalry and the infantry,
And of the elephant battalion shouted in gaiety
Over the *Cera* king's unconquerable sword;
And *Kuttuvan* himself looked like a god.

The commanders and the vanguard of the army
Came marching like the waves of the sea;
The mountain bent its back; level forest
And the countryside became well-trodden;
These and the chariots with the king in their midst
Camped in the Nilgris mountain.

The army reaches Nilgri hills

For the chariots, horses, mighty elephants and men,
There came up tents to which vigilant guardsmen
Were posted; the king dismounted from the elephant,
And his feet touched the ground, the soldiers were jubilant;
Likewise the sun's warm rays made the cold earth exultant;
The *Cera* king shortly retired to bed, content.
The noise from the camp reached the sages holy.
Flying above; they wondered at the might

Of him who rivalled *Indra.* Dazzlingly bright
They appeared before the king in assembly.
The king received and treated them reverentially;

The sages speak to Kuttuvan

They spoke, 'Listen, you who are born to rule in *Vanci*,
As wished by the god of matted red hair!
We are bound for *Potiyil*, and you for *Imayam;*
Remember your duty to aid the ascetics living there.'
Then they left, bidding goodbye to all of them.

'Hail the king of this sea-girt world!'
Cried the dancers of *Konkan* and *Karnatak*,
Who were wearing jewelry of old;
Their dark hair, darker than night,
With garlands were dight;
Necklaces of precious stones pressed
On their young and shapely breast;
The danseuses with black, carp-like eyes,
Danced and sang moving airs;
'Black *Kuyils* sing, bees hum like *Vina*,
Spring is on us; and buds open;
But my love is not seen even.'

Dancing in progress

Dancers from *Kutaku* of both sexes
Came, danced and sang before the king;
The women had long carp-like eyes, besides
And thick bangles; their song runs like this;
'Queen of women, wearing bangles heavy,
Bedeck yourself; look at the season;
With fast thunder comes rainy season;
The lover's chariot is back after busy duty.'

'Let the glorious king, who won many a victory
With his heroic sword, and his charming family
Live long,' cried the panegyrists in high pitch;
Their dance pleased *Kuttuvan* very much,
And according to the *Cera* custom,
He munificently rewarded them;
In this happy mood came the message
Of the arrival of a large assemblage
Of men and women under *Cancayan's* authority;
Actresses numbering one hundred and two,
Instrumentalists two hundred and eighty,
Professional fools and clowns one hundred,
Who had mastered every book on controversy;
Wild-natured elephants four hundred,
A hundred lotus-shaped large cars,
Twenty thousand wagons with costly wares,
And one thousand persons with turbans and coats.
With the king's permission, *Cancayan*
Entered with his dancers and musicians,

Greeting the king according to tradition;
He introduced his many adherents,
And spoke these words to the king:
Along with the hundred *Kannars* as friends,
'If it is your intention merely to bring
A holy stone for an idol, I am willing
To perform it myself; Long live the king.'

He, who took with him the god of mortality
In his war against sharp-speared enemy kings,
Had armies, immense as the sea;

Kuttuvan explains

He explained, "*Kanakan* and *Vicayan*,
Sons of *Balakumaran*, while dining with new kings
Spoke with loose tongue, ignorant of Tamil prowess;
We shall disprove them, having as witness
The hundred *Kannars* who go with us;
They are to arrange boats for the army
To cross the Ganges without difficulty."
The thousand *kancukar* innocent of falsehood,
Brought tributes of heaps of sandalwood
And pearls; tributes came from the kings
Of the south, and all got receipts with the king's
Seal on them, and they took their departure.

The great ruler of the sea-girt world his journey
Continued, so the subject chieftains
Of small territories could celebrate his victory early;
Northwards he proceeded, and with the assistance
Of *Kannars*, crossed the river Ganges
And reached its northern bank, where he was given
A truly royal welcome; Beyond
Lay northern part with watersheds in its ranges;
On the opposite side extended the enemy land,
Which *Kuttuvan* entered and camped there;
He was joined by many kings of the north;
Uttaran, Vicitiran, Urutaran, Bairavan
Cittiran, Cinkan, Tanuttaran, Civetan
Who were all curious to see his fighting worth;
Soon the armies of *Kanaka Vicayan* massed in wroth.
Like a lion, searching for food,
Bravely attacking an elephant herd,
Kuttuvan fought against the enemy forces,
Whose leaders bore fearful lances;
From *Kuttuvan's* camp, under a tent of creepers,
Martial music sounded; leather drums,
White conches, long horns, thunderous drums,
Wailing drums, and fur-covered drums sounded,
Shaking the whole earth with fear and dread,
Men with mountainous shoulders, gripping spears,
Drivers of racing chariots, heroic men on elephants

With tusks, swift-riding cavalrymen raised the dust
Everywhere on the face of the earth; stuck with dust
Were the bells tied to the necks of elephants.

Both the dusty armies fought confusedly;
Severed heads and bodies lay in heaps;
Stumbling on the heaps , the female ghosts
Stood on them, and danced ghostly dances;
In the stream of blood flowing from corpses,
The female ghosts dipped their hair joyfully.

Though the Aryan Kings had more chariot soldiers,
The Tamil army killed a large body of these men;
Smashed their chariots, broke the necks of elephants,
And the backs of horses, proving to the Aryans
'The god of death can take in a day lives without number.
Thus *Kuttuvan* of heroic anklet, the great warrior,
Put on the garland of palmyra and nettle flowers.
Brave in speech, and scornful of sweet Tamil,
Kanakan and *Vicayan*, with cruel spears
And fiftytwo armed chariots, fell prisoners
To *Kuttuvan*; the rest of the army, atremble,
Took to heals, disguised as Saivite saints,
Ash-covered ascetics saffron-robed holy men,
Jain monks with bells and peacock fans,
Wandering minstrels and musicians.

The Battle field after the carnage

So complete was the destruction.
As *Kuttuvan* harvested with his sword,
And yoked the elephants to trample over the fallen,
The guardian of war elephants shuddered.
These exploits of the ploughman of the sword did gladden
The ghosts which danced, holding the heads severed,
And sang the glory of *Kannan* churning the ocean,
Of how *Rama* fought and conquered
The island of Lanka, and of the sea-blue one
Driving the chariot; and praised *Kuttuvan*.

With severed heads as fireplace,
An elephant's head as receptacle,
And a shoulder-girdle as ladle,
The ghostly cook prepared meat and rice,
And the whole gang ate, and wished the just rule
Of the king long life, as he fought for a principle.
'Let the vedic sages doing fire ceremony,
Be guarded well in the northern region!
So ran the king's fiat to all his men.
He sent his army commander, *Villavankotai*
With a detachment to *Imayam* for the holy stone,
And it soon reached King *Kuttuvan*.

Canto 27 - The Sacred Immersion

The stone for the idol carried by Kanakan and Vijayan

Kanakan and *Vicayan*, the northern crowned heads,
Taken prisoners, had perforce to carry on their heads,
The sacred stone from *Imayam* chosen
For an idol of the chaste lady, deified by heaven.

The king with the heroic anklet, in his war
With the Aryan kings, who knew not the power
Of Tamils in fighting, swelled the number
Of Death's victims in eighteen *nalikais*
What it took in ancient days
As many years or months or days!

Immersion of the stone in holy Ganges

Leading the army of dreaded spearmen, *Kuttuvan*
Reached the banks of the Ganges, and as advised
By learned priests, he had the granite stone,
Ceremoniously in the sacred water immersed.

Short stay of the king

A palace, splendid halls, a golden-roofed stage,
A lotus tank, a lyric theatre, flower garden,
And other needs for *Kuttuvan's* sojourn
Were built on the banks of the Ganges by his Aryan
Friends; and he spent a few days with advantage.

The king honours the soldiers

Cenkuttuvan did honour all his soldiers,
The dead as well as the survivors;
A whole day he spent in this manner,
Giving siris garland, mark of a victor.
The wife or the son of each martyr got the honour;
The greatest fighters against the hauteur
Of the enemies received heavenly brides as devoir.

Some had given their heads with pride,
Fighting like heroes; some others died,
Who were by female ghosts lauded
In song; some lamentably died,
Others fought on though terribly wounded;
Yet others, seeing their opponents had fled,
Searched for more in the battlefield.
With this labour over, *Kuttuvan* put on his shoulders
A garland of palmyra and nettle flowers;
And spent joyously many hours
With his devoted men and officers.
Matalan came, greeted the king and said;

Matalan's cryptic

"It was *Matavi's* shore-song pattern
That crushed the crowned heads of *Kanakan*

remark

And *Vicayan;* with the sea-girt earth
At your feet, may your glory shine forth."

The Cera king asks for Clarification:

"Present here are many kings of alien demesne,
Who know not the hidden meaning of your words;
Explain them, you who are versed in vedic words."
Asked the king, and the reply came from the brahmin:

Matalan explains

"On the cool seashore during festival season,
Teenaged *Matavi* sang in a lyrical vein,
That offended her lover, *Kovalan;* and the strife
As decreed by fate continued; with his wife
Kovalan left for *Maturai*, whose king entered
Heavenly abode soon after; the murdered
Man's wife came to your domain
Through *Kutanatu's* hilly region.
Thus she overthrew the rulers of tne northern region."
Valiant king! to know why I came, listen:
Taking a holy bath in the great ghat at *Kumari*,
I travelled to *Potiyil* hill, and reverentially
Walked round it; was it fate guiding me?
For, the fame of *Maturai* pulled me,
And I heard that the mighty *Pantiyan*
Of powerful armies was routed by a woman
With an anklet,' so his account ran.
"*Matari* went up to the village hall swiftly
And cried out. *Kovalan* is not guilty
It is the king who has done injustice;
Friends, I have failed to look after the safely
Of my guests; Are the king's crown and sceptre guilty?
In this mood she entered burning *Maturai*
At midnight in darkness, there to die.
"The wrath of *Kavunti* was lessened
By the king's death; yet thinking the couple's fate
Was hastened, as it coupled with her own fate,
She went on a fast unto death to the bitter end.
I went to victorious *Celiyan's* city
In his beautiful chariot; this I saw and learning
Every detail, I bore patiently everything;
And returned to my home filled with pity.
"In the *Cola* capital, *Pukar*, I met the leading
Citizens and apprised them of everything.

Kovalan's father becomes a monk

The grief-striken father of *Kovalan*
Viewing the fate of his son, of the young woman,
And of the king, gave his wealth to charity;
He himself, after praying at the seven temples
To *Indra*, took to the Buddhist monastery
Before the three hundred aerial mystics,
Who had the chain of births severed
In their progress towards heavenly abode;

Kovalan's mother, in grief without end,
Met with a gloom-filled end.

Before the holy Jain monks, saffron-robed,
Kannaki's father performed deeds of charity;
And he adopted a life of complete piety;
His wife pined away, and her life fled.

Matavi, at this news, spoke to her mother:
'I tell you what is good: exempt my daughter
From the sinful life of a harlot.'
And presently, she cast off her garlanded hair
Before Buddhist monks and took up holy order.

"On hearing my words, some died to pain;
And I went to the Ganges to cleanse my sin:
King of kings, may you prosper", he paused.

The *Cera* King who wore his traditional garland,
Woven of flowers from the palmyra and white nettle,
Enquired of *Matalan*, "What happened
After the king's death in the southern capital

Matalan continues

"When *Killivalavan*, your kinsman, lay claim
To the throne on the death of his elder brother,
Nine chieftains of equal rank opposed him,
And by disobeying the king's order, created disorder;
In one day you restored *Valavan* to undisputed power.
Another time you defeated the proud *Palaiyan*
And cut down his favourite tree, margosa,
And wore the garland of the flowers of Palmyra.
Listen, *Celiyan* of *Korkai* went to *Maturai*,
Where he offered human sacrifices
Of a thousand goldsmiths in a day
To the single-breasted goddess,
Thus restoring the pride and prestige of the city;

"Though he belonged to the lunar dynasty,
He brought light to darkened *Maturai*,
Like the sun riding on a chariot, drawn
By seven horses; and he ascended the throne;
King of kings; May you rule for eternity."

The day was done, and evening set in
With the western horizon turning crimson;
The crescent moon was seen, and its beauty
Was appreciated by the mighty king.

The astrologer speaks

The astrologer said, 'Great and noble king!
You rule the world, and it is thirtytwo months
Since you left your capital of *Vanci*.'

The king passed through many a broad street,
Where stood chariots and banners,
Under the roof decorated with flowers;
Then he entered a narrow street
Lined with houses, curiously shaped;
Lastly he crossed a hall embellished
By skilled artists, and reached
A gold-covered throne, his seat.
Ordering his servant to call *Matalan*
The king asked the well-informed brahmin;
"After the death of the rival princes,

The king asks about the Cola King

Does the *Cola* rule with justice and fairness?"
Matalan replies as follows:
"Long live my king! it was the *Cola* sceptre
That destroyed the three skyey forts with spear;
This feat filled the god of gods with wonder.
The same sceptre protected the dove from the kite,
And gave his own flesh to satisfy the kite's right;
How could such a tradition be kept not?
Let the rains fail; *Cola* farmers suffer not."

The king rewards Matalan

The king, much pleased, gave rich rewards
To *Matalan* -- his weight of fifty *tulans*
In gold -- and had the hundred *Kannars*
Go back to their fertile kingdoms.

Kuttuvan ordered a thousand uniformed officers
To take charge of the following prisoners:
Princes who had armies of their own,
But who tried to run away from battle;
Kanaka Vicaya kings who were brothers
And who denigrated Tamil heroic renown,
Besides others fleeing from battle,
Disguised as women singers and dancers
With narrow chin, long fish-like eyes, dark hairs,
Smiling mouths, bangled arms, white teeth,
Young ripening breasts, bamboo-like shoulders,
Vanishing waists, tender complexion, and small feet;
These prisoners further were to be taken to *Pantiya*
And *Cola* kings to enhance the honour of the *Cera*

In the fields around the Ganges fed by the river,
Lotuses bloomed and bees hummed ever;
The sun rose over the top of the eastern mountain;
The king from the west travelling north,
Met in battle and defeated the kings of the north;
And he turned homewards, his mission done;

City of Vanci described

In the wealthy city of *Vanci*, among tall buildings
That seemed to block the passage of the sun,

The golden palace of the queen was one.
The terrace was enclosed by hangings,
Of which lines of pearls formed a part;
Precious stones in the cot were inlaid;
Diamonds inset, gold joints were made;
The legs swelled outwards; on the cot
Were two pillows filled with feathers
Of swans inseparable and found only in pairs;

The queen suffers in loneliness

Sleep deserting the queen, sadness
Filled her heart at her lord's absence.

Her loyal maids spoke with an inkling
Of the victory of the charioted king
'Give up your suffering in being lonely.
And sang songs symbolically.
Wishing the *Cera* queen long life.
The hunchback and the dwarf said hopefully
'You will soon be restored to normality,
As our master has arrived here;
Beautify your fragrant hair.'

The tribal women's welcome to the victorious king

"The hillbilly, drunk with bamboo liquor,
Kept not vigil, catapulting birds that gather;
Hence, the elephant, eating in excess,
Lay there and went into somnolence.
Having been victorious in the north, having worn
Siris and dead-nettle flowers, let no one
Stand in the way of his mighty wild run."
Thus from the high platform sang the tribal women;

The plowmen rejoice

"Razing to the ground the forts of the Aryan rulers.
Sowing white millet, and using a plow yoked to a donkey,
Came the victorious king of the *Kutavars;*
And on the eve of his birthday, he releases prisoners,"
Sang the plowmen in their own vocabulary.

In *Porunai* the paste, the powder, and the flowers
Discarded by the bathers, coloured the waters
All the way to the great ghats for bathing;
It was shaped like the bow of *Indra* in the making.
Bee-loving blue water-lilies and lotus,
The heads of shepherds decorated and displayed;
The shepherds sat on the branches of screwpine,
And on their pipes, in the *Marutam* mode, played:

The shepherds offer welcome

"The great bowman has come
With Himalayan sheep; give him welcome."

Under the shade of a big Alexandrian laurel
On the white sand, shored up by foaming
Sea breakers, is the right-spiralled oyster's pearl
With eagerness received by girls playing,

Their bangled arms extended, and with palms open.
Their sweet tongues sing mellifluously:

The welcome by the girls

"The divine king has come, and our passion
Can be assuaged with exquisite bliss,
When our budding shapely breasts
On his handsome shoulders press;
But shy as we are, we sing the praise
Of his nettle, palmyra, and *vanci*."

Savouring her past rapture, the queen
Her wonted zest and health did regain.
In token, her bangles fitted her perfectly.
Under a white parasol, wearing a garland of *Siris*,
Mark of victory, the *Cera* king rode majestically
On the royal elephant; announcing his entry,
The white conchs were blown in welcome;
In the thick crowd, the citizens all
Gladly paid their homage, and praised him;
Thus *Cenkuttuvan* entered *Vanci* capital.

Canto 28 - Installation of the Idol

His cool parasol over the whole world,
Kuttuvan of the great sword, and land of plenty,
Ruled from the ancient city of *Vanci*;
The housewives scattering flowers inside,
And lighting white-wicked lamps cried:
'Long live the king of the world.'

The soldiers disbanded

Having fought the king's war victoriously,
The soldiers bearing swords bravely,
Were very happy to be disbanded,
Though some had their chests pierced by arrows,
Or by enemy swords wounded,
Or by elephant tusks gored.
They didn't mind their wounds,
As they believed the breasts of their lovers,
Vibrant with energy, and with sandal figures
Could cure their gaping wounds.

"My darling has her cloud-like hair spread out
For incense fumes to perfume and dry out;
Her face like the moon in the midst of cumulus
Appears; the eyebrows are sharp arrows;
Her glances outbeat the flowery arrows
Of the love-god, and surely cure my sickness."

Their wives and sweet hearts praised

Through red berry-like lips, moonlight
Smile streams; passion-filled eyes,
Like carps, are in a tremble; and honey,
With new taste, collects in her mouth rapidly;
Complexioned like tender mango leaves,
They surrender to their lovers for mutual delight.

On her bright and perfect face she had
A black mark of musk in her forehead;
Her curly hair had bee-haunted flowers;
The mirror before her reflected the features.
Hair-do, and make-up; holding a *vina* with trunk
Cured, strings well-tuned, and a fair neck,
She played in *palai* and *kurinci* modes delightfully,
And fed her lover with many a dainty.

Kuttuvan of the heroic anklet who proves his mettle
With enemy kings, is all kindness to his people;
Like him, the sun having been the hottest
In the famed city of old, now coolly set in the west.
Men and women are traditional followers
Of the God of love with arrows, made of flowers;
He rules in moonlit terraces, beds strewn with flowers,
Whitewashed stage, flower-decked pavilion,
White-legged cots, roofed balconies -- wherever men
Seek pleasure with their counterparts, the women.

The god of love takes over

Like the tall many-peaked *Meru* mountain,
In the middle of this rich sea-girt world,
In the heart of *Vanci* stood a tall mansion,
Where queen *Venmal* walked toward
The gem-decked terrace, lit by the moon
To admire the loveliness of the scene.

Bangled maids holding lamps lighted the way
Of the queen, while others praised her alway.
Songs were sung to the accompaniment of drums
And the *vina*; hunchbacks and dwarfs
Held ointment of musk, and sandal-paste;
Lime powder, garlands and coloured paste;
Eunuchs, more female than male held
Flowers, burning incense, and scented
Preparations were kept by the side of the bed,
That was made of antelope hair; dresses,
Mirrors, and jewels were borne by young ladies.

With her, the ruler of the sea-encircled world,
Ascended the gem-decked bedstead.

Dance before the king and queen

An artiste from *Paraiyur* who was a vedic brahmin,
Performed Lord *Civa's Kotukotti* dance before *Kuttuvan*,
The anklets on his painted legs chimed in unison;
The small drum in his hand was expertly beaten;
His red eyes expressed varied emotions;
The matted hair swung in eight directions;
Uma's anklets and her shoulder-clasps shook not;
Her girdle and her tender breasts trembled not.
The performance gave the king great pleasure;
And the happy dancer took his departure.
The uniformed officers with their leader, *Velan*,
Returned, and with them came *Matalan*
They informed the king of their arrival by the gatekeeper;
On the king's permission, they entered and bowed to the ruler

Velan reports

And said, "Your majesty of nettle garland, heroic
In battle, and wearing an anklet symbolic,
We reached the *Cola* capital, and saw the king,
Seated in a strikingly beautiful hall, that the king
Of *Makata* had presented; the pavilion a gift of the king
Of *Vaccira*, and the noble entrance by the *Avanti* king;
We and our prisoners made obeisance to the *Cola* ruler
And reported our martial deeds with you as leader.

Cola king speaks in disparagement

'To capture these cowardly kings, who betrayed
Their swords, sceptres, and parasols, and who tried
To escape, was no victorious deed,' he said.
The king laughed and ridiculed our exploits
To the great captains of the war chariots."

"My king, the soul of justice, we left for *Maturai*
To meet the *Pantiya* king; we heard him say;

The Pantiya king also speaks disparagingly

'The Aryan kings had their white parasol
Handle made into *Cayantan* symbol,
And carried it on the back of an elephant,
With folded hands they sat repentant;
Later, donning the robes of holy men,
They left for the Himalayan mountain
To pray to Lord *Civa* and his consort, *Uma*,
Leaving the battlefield to the *Cera*;
Is it Tamil heroism to defeat cowardly kings,
And to capture them when they try to escape?
Tamil annals have not recorded such things.'
Thus *Nilan* reported truly, not changing the shape.

When the king heard this, his lotus-eyes with anger
Filled and burned as fire; and he laughed aloud;
Matalan then spoke words of wisdom without a cloud;

Matalan speaks

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'King of kings, may you and your justice prosper.

wisely to Kuttuvan

You destroyed *Viyalur* growing *neytal* in abundance,
Besides having a mountain with pepper plants,
In whose shade sleep the wild elephants;
You defeated nine kings wearing *atti* at *Nerivayil*,
Chasing them across the sea, in a naval battle,
After camping your war-chariots at *Itumpil* ;
On the banks of the Ganges, the Aryan kings you did quell
After engaging them in a fierce battle.
Leader of an army ever victorious,
And having qualities of the sagacious!
Be calm and curb your fury;

Matalan continues

Ruler of the world! May the days of your life
Be countless as the sands of *Porunai*!
Ruler of the sea-girt earth, long be your life!
Listen to my words without mockery:
For fifty years you have ruled this country;
All this while you have sought riches and glory;
You are the victor of a naval battle;
On the Himalayas you have affixed your symbol;
Rewarding the learned poet, you have made it possible
For him to go to heaven; the work of the god of death
You have reorganized; established your rule in the land
Governed by foreigners, and went to *Imayam* in the north;
You have demolished *Akappa* with your band;
Bathed goddess *Korravai* of *Ayirai* eminence
With the waters of the two seas; brought to *Vanci*
The guardian spirits of squares and did soma sacrifice;
Yet none of the famous persons survived, you know perfectly;
In this wide world, riches do not abide in one place;
Yet with a just sceptre, and the goddess of prosperity
On your chest you have seen grey hairs mark of senility.

Good souls in heaven may be reborn as humans;
Humans as animals, and animals as demons;
Like wandering players, souls do not stay in one place;
Our deeds determine our future, say the seers;
Hence you who wear, as victor, a seven-crowned necklace,
Let kingly power stay with your successors.

"I have not come to win from you rich rewards;
Souls that dwell in bodies of great capability
Should in this wide world aspire for divinity;
You, master of wisdom, listen to my words:
Vedic sacrifices prescribed for kings
You need to perform with priestly cooperation:
This will surely lead you to salvation,
That would gladden heavenly beings.
If you postpone it for tomorrow, who knows
For certain his last day? Suppose....."

Matalan prayed for long life to the king,
His consort, and the brave kings kneeling

The Cera king gives up war and becomes religious

Before him; he did sow thoughts of higher being
In the mind of *Kuttuvan*, the *Cera* king.
The sowing resulted in abundant harvest;
The valiant king, eager to enjoy the best,
Engaged priests, who had studied the *vedas*,
And had all doubts cleared by their *gurus*,
To perform the sacrificial rites to conform
To the wise *Matalan's* prescription.

He released the Aryan kings from prison,
And lodged them in Velavikko mansion
Outside the city walls, and surrounded
By shady groves; he announced their freedom
To go home, after the sacrifices were concluded.
He instructed *Villavankotai* to show due courtesy to them;
'Let all our prisoners free; no more taxes for them'.
He said, and sent *Alumpil Vel* and revenue officers
To the villages under these chieftains to carry out orders.
The unalloyed truth of the ancient saying,
That even the highest form of woman's chastity
Will not be regarded as noble, if every king
Doesn't rule with pure justice was impressed
On the king, who wore an *atti* garland,
By the most famous lady of chastity.
When justice goes astray, the only remedy is dying;
This idea was instilled in the mind of the *Pantiyan* king;
The idea of vengeance, once it is born, will not rest
Until it is accomplished; this truth was impressed
On the northern kings by the *Cera* from the west.

It was the chaste breast torn out of the body,
That burned down the ancient *Maturai* city;
Her wandering steps led her to *Cera* country;
While she stood in the golden shade of a kino tree,
The angels came and took to heaven this lady;

Wishing to honour her by building a temple,
The sagest priests, astrologers, and many an artisan
Were asked to choose a site suitable;

Installation of the idol

And the temple was built according to plan;
The entrances were manned by the deities
Of the four directions, and the idol fashioned
Was installed after it was with jewels adorned;
Daily worship and festival were ordered.
The subject kings were commanded
To be present at the consecration ceremony
By him who over the northern kings scored a victory.

Canto 29 - In Praise of *Kuttuvan*

In praise of Kutțuvan

Cenkuttuvan was the son of *Ceralatan*
And the *Cola* princess, radiant as the sun;
The father's fiat ran from *Kumari* to *Imayam*,
While the son, by defeating the *Konkars*, won fame;
In addition, he crossed the Ganges and vanquished
The northern kings; his reputation was established;
In this state he ruled the country from *Vanci*,
When the Aryan rulers of the north, during a royal
Wedding, boasted, 'At the time the southern Tamil
King marched to *Imayam*, and etched his symbol
On the mountain face, kings like us were not in saddle
In these parts'; hearing these words spoken arrogantly,
Some sages reported them to the *Cera*; it was like hitting
With a stick round rings that moved naturally,
For, the king, in response to it, decided to bring
A stone from *Imayam* for the idol of a goddess,
Thus inducing him to prove his prowess.

Cenkuttuvan overthrew the Aryan kings in the field,
And made them carry the stone on their head;
After bathing it in holy Ganges water,
The *Cera* turned toward home giving up his anger.
The finest artisans were employed to shape
The holy stone into an idol of the goddess
Of Chastity, for the crowned heads also to worship;
At the entrance to the temple, idols of deities
Were installed to protect the devotees.
Pujas and festivals were there for the goddess;
The king, priests, sages, and artisans did assemble
At the consecration of the gods in the temple.

The faith of Macattuvan

Meanwhile *Matalan* reported to *Macattuvan*
Of how the moonlike face of *Kannaki* was stricken
With grief, her carp-like eyes were tear-filled,
Her beautiful hair was dishevelled and dust-filled;
Unable to bear the injustice of the king,
How she met him with proofs so convincing,
That the *Pantiya* then and there breathed his last,
Followed by his consort; on hearing to the last,
Macattuvan renounced worldly life altogether;
And his wife's life broke its bodily fetter.

Feeling overwhelmed with misery, *Kannaki's* maid,
Her nurse, and her friend *Tevanti*, who had lived
With the god *Cattan*, set out for *Maturai*.
There they heard of the havoc caused by *Kannaki*,

In whose search they called at the home of *Matari*
Who, guilt-ridden, had killed herself.
With *Aiyai* they followed the route of *Kannaki* herself
Along the southern bank of *Vaikai* river;
After climbing a high mountain, they came near
The temple of *Kannaki,* now a goddess of chastity;
To the *Cera* king they explained themselves fully.

Tevanti speaks

"Born in the Himalayas, that the Tamil rulers
Guarded zealously, she bathed in the Ganges;
She wore curved ornaments on her shoulders;
I was this *Cola* lady's companion, know this."

Kannaki's maid speaks

"She bore with patience her rival *Matavi,*
Though she herself was utterly lonely;
She followed her husband faithfully
Across desert land, where even wells were dry;
To this lady of large eyes I was maid know this;
To the lady from *Pukar* I was maid know this."

The nurse speaks

"She didn't confide in her mother; me, her nurse,
She did not take into confidence;
With chastity as sole ideal she followed
Her husband; I was her nurse, know this
To the lady from *Pukar* I was nurse, know this".

Tevanti bewails

"Poor in spiritual wealth, I did not fathom
The forewarning given in your dream;
Lady of luxuriant hair, nought I did;
Why did I go wrong? When your breast did
The havoc, did you hear of your mother's death?
Or your mother-in-law's last breath?"

The maid bewails

"Knowing that evil had wrought *Kovalan's* death,
The *Pantiya* king gave up his ghost;
At this, *Macattuvan* sighed, 'Death
Is life', and gave all to public welfare;
He as well as *Manaykan* embraced
Monastic life; did you know, mother?"

The Nurse bewails

"The lover died, and you grieved, his darling,
Hearing also the insults of enemies; sighing,
Matavi parted with her riches before the clergy
Of Buddhism, and entered a nunnery;
Did you hear about it, mother?
Manimekalai followed suit, my mother!"

Showing Aiyai she bewails

"I failed to protect the persons left in my care
By the clear-sighted one this sense of failure
Drove her to madness, and finally to death;
This young shy virgin, with white lovely teeth,

Is her daughter-your aunt's daughter;
Did you see her, my companion dear?"

Kuttuvan sees a vision

"What, what is this strange vision?
With gold anklets, girdle of perfection,
Arms full of bangles, ear-rings of diamonds,
And purest gold ornaments;
Her figure, lighting slender, does glisten;
A female vision I see on the horizon."

Kannaki's voice is heard

"The southern king is guiltless; he is even
Now with the *devas*, and his daughter I am;
I will stay on the hill of *Murukan*, the spear-god
Dear companions, come to see me often."

The women of Cera natu begin to sing of Kannaki

"Slender-waisted, liana-like girls of *Vanci*,
Of the great spearman's country!
Girls with painted feet! come and sing
In honour of the lady's victory over the king
Of the *Pantiyas* with her anklet, and burned
Down with her breast *Maturai* city!
Let us sing of the daughter of the *Pantiya* king,
Who died when his sceptre inclined to partiality

The women of Vanci call for communal singing

"Let us sing of the lady who visited your land
Let us praise the daughter of the king of *Pantiya* land!
We hailed her as our king's daughter;
Vaikai claimed her as her lord's daughter;
Let us praise our *Cera* king;
The divine lady will praise the *Pantiya* king."

To prevent her fateful tears of misery,
The king gave up his own life; it is his own glory;
Long live the king of *Maturai* city,
Surrounded by *Vaikai*, that ever brings prosperity.

To the very crown of the earth's ruler
Was raised the mountain-king's daughter;
May he live long as also his ancient dynasty,
That rules over *Porunai*-fed *Vanci.*

We sing of the king of *Kaviri*-fed territory,
And we praise *Pukar* city of the *Cola* country.

Who guarded the heavenly fortress,
And ruled over the sea-girt earth, you know?
He who guarded the high walls of the fortress,
And destroyed the three hanging enemy forts,
Was the king of the *Colas*, I know well;
We shall sing of *Pukar* the capital.

To heavenly applause which king did justice
To the dove by giving' his own flesh, my dear?
He who removed his own flesh did justice
To the complaining milch-cow, my dear;
Let us sing of the king of *Pukar*, my dear.

Who carved on *Imayam* a leopard's figure
To the wonder of the eight elephants of mythology my dear?
The king who ruled the earth in all directions, is the answer;
Hence let us sing of his *Pumpukar* my dear.
Why do bejewelled girls sing in private
While playing the ball game, my dear
Since they desire their breasts, by sandal paste
Beautified, to be embraced by the brave ruler.
We shall sing of the beauty of *Pumpukar.*

Golden liana-like maiden with your glittering
Gold necklace, and your silken girdle rustling
Let us play the ball game, singing, 'long live the *Pantiya*
Who wears *Indra's* gift; let us sing of the *Pantiya.*

Let us play the ball, back and forth
Like the play of lightning on earth,
This way and that, and let us sing in honour
Of him who does the divine jewel wear.

Swiftly it comes to hand, and swiftly
It leaps from earth; let the ball fly
Like this while we sing, 'May the *Pantiya* live long;
May he who wears the divine gift, live long.'
While you go up in a rope swing, my friend,
Rhythmically lifting your right arm,
Let us sing of him, who cut off the cedar tree,
Our eyes slanting towards the left arm;
Let us sing of the taut bow's glory,
And play on the swing, my friend.

With our locks of hair dancing, let us swing
And sing the praise of the generous *Cera* king,
Who fed the hosts in the great battle
Between the *Panṭavas* and their hundred foes;
Let us sing of the *Cera's* cedar bravery,
And play on our swings gaily.

Let us praise in song the *Cera* king.
Who conquered the foreigners, who had spoken ill,
Besides mastering the mighty northern mountain;
He ruled over *Kumari* and the lands in between,
Having added the fish and the leopard to his symbol

Of the bow; let us swing, our slender hips swaying.

Under the shade of *Kanci, Pukar* women
Pound corals with sticks of sugarcane;
Royalty rides on a chariot with his banner;
Our truest songs are about the king's valour,
About his *atti* garland women sing songs,
Entreating him to give, and they are the saddest songs.
The women of *Maturai* with ruby pestles
Pound oysters to get rare pearls;
They sing of the divine garland of the *Pantiya*
And of his well-known fish insignia;
In praise of his neem garland they sing songs;
That are ever the most spontaneous songs.

With ivory pestles do the women of *Vanci*
Pound in sandalwood block for pearls of a rarity;
Of the victorious *Cera* with palm garland they sing,
But when the garland charms them, the best songs they
    sing.

"Rulers of large kingdoms like the *Colan* and *the Pantiyan*
Bend not their knees to the great bowman, *Porayan;*
And they praise him but rarely;"
But the great Colanatu lady,
Spoke, 'May *Cenkuttuvan* live long' clearly.

Canto 30 - Granting of Boons

The Ceran asks about Manimekalai

The valiant *Cera* to whom the North bowed in submission,
After seeing the divine idol, turned to *Tevanti*
And questioned her, "The much-lamented *Manimekalai*,
What is she, and what is the reason for renunciation?"

Tevanti replies

Wishing the king endless victories,
That earned his country more riches,
She described *Manimekalai's* taking holy orders,
Though excelling all other girls in grace.

"Lovely are her dark tresses and luxuriant,
That could be dressed in five different styles;

Cittirapati's question

The red lines of her eyes have spread to the tips
To captivate men; yet she remains innocent;
Between her ruby lips are seen coral teeth
Young and regular; her close breasts lie docile;
They know not yet what it is to be nubile;
Broad is her embraceable front, narrow the waist,
Her pudendum ample, the thighs rounded;
The feet, tender as shoots in ghee, are tiny and resist
Beautification; she is not going to excel in dance
As the dance-master has given her up as hopeless,
So that the noble scions fight shy of being patrons.
What do you say?" asked *Cittirapati*, the grandmother.

Matavi takes her daughter away

The response of *Matavi* was in character:
She said, 'Come *Manimekalai*, my dear daughter';
And took her away, and cut off the fair hair,
Dedicated her to a life of piety and prayer.
The God of love flung his bow and arrow in anger.

The king and people of *Pukar* grieved greatly
At *Manimekalai's* renouncing everything worldly,
As if they had lost a jewel in the deep sea;
The saintly *Aravanan* soothingly said, 'the bangled maid
Herself informed me of her intention
To give up all physical desires and attraction.'
And *Tevanti* added, 'At this young age, this maid
Marred her divine beauty, and this I moaned.'

Presently *Tevanti's* hair fell in disorder;
Her eyebrows trembled; her coral lips in laughter
Pouted in her rosy mouth; incoherent her utterances;
Her face perspired in abundance;
She swung her arms high; her eyes became crimson;

Tevanti spoke when possessed by god

She leaped in the air; an energy unknown
She combined with incomprehension; her lips went dry;
God-possessed *Tevanti* spoke nobly.

In the company of ornamented and soft-spoken women,
Came three young girls to witness
The consecration ceremony before *Cenkuttuvan*
Whose mountains grow shoots numerous;
Of the three girls, two were twins born to *Arattan*,
A merchant, and the third was daughter of a servant
At the temple of *Vishnu* where the god in a golden
Chamber reclined on the coils of a serpent.
Near the temple of the goddess of chastity,
On the high mountains there is a locality,
Where bamboos grow thick; in the adjacent hill,

Shaped like an elephant trill many springs,
One of which gushes slowly like the flow
Of fine white sand mixed with coarse red ones;
Its water gives the power to transcend
The present and relive the past.

I brought in a begging bowl some of this water;
And I gave it to you who sat at the entrance
Of *Kannaki* temple; the bowl is also with you;
The power of the water lasts till sunset;
If you sprinkle it on the three girls,
They will recapture their past life.
Matalan! I am *Pacanta Cattan*
I have entered the body of *Tevanti*, a brahmin.

Matalan tells the Cera king the history of Malati

The king, exceedingly pleased, enquiringly looked
At *Matalan*, who happily remarked,
"My king, let your evil wither and fall dead,"
And continued, "One childless *Malati* breastfed
The child of her sister, but by the will of fate,
It died of suffocation; Disconsolate,
Malati prayed at the feet of *Pacanta Cattan*,
Who, becoming a child, did gladden her heart;
The child grew up to manhood, and married *Tevanti*;
After living with her for eight years,
He showed her his immortal beauty,
And left her saying she could meet him
Again at the holy dwelling.

"In the guise of a priest in the temple of *Mankalatevi*,
Pacanta Cattan came and gave a bowl for safekeeping to me;
As he returned not, I carried it along;
He possessed this holy woman, and asked me
To sprinkle the water on these maids;
Sire, Let me do it in order to know the truth."

"The sins of your past birth curst
Your loving husband, who praised you at first,
And later betrayed you grievously;
You bore all that patiently, not telling me,
Though I bled inwardly with pity.
Following your husband you did suffer
Much in a strange land, my daughter!
The staff of my life, won't you come to me,
And relieve me of misery!"

Kovalan's mother laments

"She who was dear to me, you took away
At night, and she had to suffer all alone,
And I, unable to assist, pined away;

Won't you come? Don't you hear my moan?"

"Returning from the bathing ghat of *Vaikai*,
Where freshets come all of a sudden,
Matari's account of the tragedy
I heard the young people of the ancient village
Speak of the tragedy, and I ran to your cottage
Like mad, to find you gone away for ever;
My dear young mother, where are you hidden?"

The three maids broke out in lamentation
In the characters of the mother of *Kannaki*,
Of *Kovalan's* mother and of *Malati*
Before the broad-chested king *Kuttuvan*,
Who was a conqueror of distinction.

The king, who wore a palmyra garland,
And a heroic anklet looked at the face of *Matalan*;
This brahmin with a sacred thread,
Spoke in detail of the king's reflections.

Matalan gives details
"From certain death to save a poor brahmin,
Kovalan fought a mad elephant, risking his life,
For, which virtuous deed he was taken to heaven;
The mothers of *Kannaki* and *Kovalan* were born
As the twin daughters of the wife of *Arattan Chetty*
Of *Vanci*, which drew *Kannaki* instinctively;
To a servant of a *Vishnu* temple was *Matari* born.
It is nothing new for the virtuous to go to heaven;
Or for those who love intensely to be born again.

For the living to die, and for the dead to be born,
From ancient times have been the rule of life;
Owing to the grace of Lord *Civa* you were born
In *Vanci* to bring glory to it, and you have seen
Clearly the effect of holy deeds; the figure
Of greatness as in a kalaidoscope passes through life;
Great soul, for many a year may you be the ruler."

These words of *Matalan* gave the king much pleasure;
And he made endowments for daily prayer
At the temple of *Kannaki*, who had her breast
Plucked out and hurled at *Maturai*, and cursed
The city to burn; to cinders it was reduced.
The *Cera* ordered daily festival and decoration
Of the idol, entrusting *Tevanti* with the function
Of daily ceremonies with flowers and sandal;
Piously three times he went round the idol;
In the presence of *Cenkuttuvan*, the Aryan Kings
And other recently released prisoner-kings,
The king of *Malva*, the *Konkars* of *Kutaku*

And the Ceylon king, *Kayavaku,*
Prayed to the goddess to bless them,
At the festival in each kingdom
To be held in *Imayavarampan's* honour.
A supernatural voice was heard, "I grant your prayer."
All the kings and soldiers were filled with rapture,
As if the doors of heaven itself were kept ajar;
The *Cera*, lauded by all, entered the sacrificial altar.

The author says

I too went in, and rising before me,
Divine *Kannaki* spoke through *Tevanti;*
You, seated below the king, in the royal hall
At *Vanci*, have the kingly qualities all'
At which you looked at the speaker angrily,
And to remove your elder brother, *Kuttuvan's* misery,
(*Kuttuvan* also possessed all the qualities of royalty)
You took a holy vow before the men godly
Outside the western entrance to the city.
'You became a king of spiritual domain
And limitless joy,' said the daughter divine.

Matalan continues

Having heard of your goodness and honour,
I repeat to you the wise words spoken by her;
'Believe that God exists, and listen to the believers;
Protect the helpless; be grateful to helpers;
Life being imperfect, strive for perfection;
Cherish domestic life; desire not other women;
Stick to truth, and keep away from lies;
Eschew evil; seek the company of the wise;
Harm not others, nor cause pain and anxiety;
Eat no meat; do not kill any living thing;
Give up drinking, stealing, and whoring;
Scorn scandals; pray for piety."

Conclusion

Of the three crowned heads - the rulers of the west --
Beautifully garlanded, and noted for the best
Rule, fair justice, and martial prowess
Is a scion of the *Cera* dynasty, famous
In history and culture, that are well
Reflected in the life of *Vanci* people;
In their music, drama, dance, and luxury;
The glorious festivals visited by heavenly
Beings, the unbroken happiness.
And swelling population, the victories
Achieved by the armies, which maintained
A high morality. as when they remained
In the north, fighting against *Kanaka Vicayan,*
Under the command of King *Cenkuttuvan.*

EPILOGUE

Epilogue

With *Kumari* in the south, and *Veṅkatam* in the north,
The sea in the east and the west, Tamilnadu does stretch;
Its two parts -- *Centamilnatu* and *Kotuntamilnaṭu*
Have five geographical regions where the people
Hold righteousness as the principle of life,
And its parts -- family life, economy and love --
Besides conforming to the social laws for mortals and gods.
Their language is formed according to grammar:
In words and their meanings; the arts of music
And dance flow naturally from the speech
Like the shadow cast by the two mountains
In the land; thus ends the account
Of *Cilappatikaram* and is complete with
Maṇimekalai, its sequel.

NOTES AND EXPLANATIONS

Notes and Explanations

Patikam and Note

Line

1. *Kuravas:* a hill tribe that lived in the hills dividing the *Pantiya* from the *Cera* kingdom.

3. *Kunavayil* monastery: a Jain monastery situated near or in the hills mentioned above.

4. *Kutanatu:* western kingdom

5. *Veṅkai* tree: kino tree *(pterocarpus marsupium)*

10. *Cattan:* the Tamil poet who composed *Manimekalai*, and a friend of *Ilango*, sage and poet.

12. *Pukar:* capital of *Cola* kingdom.

13. *Colas:* one of the three dynasties of ancient Tamilnadu.

    Atti: Sacred to Lord *Civa*.

19. *Maturai:* capital of *Pantiya* kingdom.

    The *Panṭiyas:* one of the three dynasties of ancient Tamilnadu; the southern most kingdom.

85. *Koṅkunatu:* the western part of Tamilnadu, above the *Cera* kingdom comprising *Coimbatore* and neighbouring districts.

    Kocar: Clan of *Koṅkunatu*

Canto 1

5. Silver-topped mountain: The Himalayas.

6. *Kaviri:* the most important river which irrigates *Colanatu*, it takes its rise in Coorg mountain, and flows southeast to a wide delta in Tamilnadu to join the Bay of Bengal. It is 475 miles long.

13. *Potiyil:* a hill in *Pantiya* kingdom, and is sacred to *Akattiyar*.

18. *Nakas: devas* given to luxury who live in a beautiful region of their own.

23. Goddess of the red lotus: *Lakshmi*

24. Northern star: *Aruntati* a model of chastity transformed into a star.

32. *Murukan:* an important God of Tamils; son of God *Civa*. A very handsome god.

41. Parasol: white umbrella of a king that symbolizes justice; a canopy of royalty.

Sacred thread: Yellow thread round the neck of a woman symbolizing her married State.

46. Star of stars: Polestar or the northern star as it is called.

49. Conjunction of the moon and *Rohini*: the first lunar asterism.

50. Sacred fire: the bride and the bridegroom walk round it as part of the marriage ceremony.

58. *Kumkum:*red powder worn by women on their forehead.

Canto 2

12. Divine artisan: *Visvakarma*, son of *Brahma*.

27. God of summer: companion to *Kaman*, the god of love.

38. *Civa:* one of the Hindu trinity of gods; the god who destroys.

39.
42. *Lakshmi:* consort of Lord *Vishnu*, second of the trinity of gods; she came out of the ocean when it was churned, emerging before the moon, and hence senior or elder to the moon, who was worn by *Civa* on His matted locks of hair.

44. *Kaman:* the god of love who is invisible, and who shoots flowery arrows at men and women to make them fall in love.

46. *Indra:* *Vedic* god of thunder and lightning; the lord of gods, but lower than the trinity of gods.

Vaccira: *Indra's* weapon.

47. *Amrita:* ambrosia that came out of the cosmic ocean.

48. Six-faced god: Lord *Muruka*, son of *Civa;* he was born out of the third eye of *Civa;* he has six faces and twelve arms.

68. *Toyyil:* designs on the breasts of women made with sandal paste.

Canto 3

1. Sage of the sacred hills: *Agattiyar*.

2. *Urvaci:* an immortal nymph expert in dance, attached to *Indra's* court.

4. *Indra's* son: *Cayantan* who became infatuated with *Urvaci*, who lost the rhythm of her dance; this provoked *Akattiyar* who cursed the lovers to be born on earth.

54. *Palai:* a musical mode.

79. *Talaikkol:* a wooden staff symbolizing perfect dance and music.

Canto 4

32
58. *Mons veneris:* Mount of Venus -- a protuberance of the human female body, formed by the pubic bones.

Canto 5

24. *Vettilai:* betel leaf, chewed by one and all in Tamilnadu; on auspicious occasions they are presented to all guests.

39. Guardian genie: sent by Lord *Indra* to guard the *Cola* capital; once the *Cola* king fought the evil angels who had attacked *Indra's* capital and saved his city.

42. *Tunanku:* a group dance where the dancers rest their hands on hips.

Kuravai: another group dance where the dancers stand holding hands with their neighbours.

57. *Tirumavalavan: Karikal Peruvalavan*, the *Cola* king.

67 *Vaccira*, *Makata*, and *Avanti:* kingdoms in North India overrun by the *Cola* king.

79. The genie: It guarded the stores of merchants in *Pukar*.

89. Genius of the square: guardian spirit that did police work.

91. The statue of justice: female spirit that shed tears when an injustice was committed.

99. *Vaccirakkotam* temple dedicated to *Vaccira*, *Indra's* weapon.

113. Five orders of officers: Ministers, Religious heads, Commander-in-chief, Ambassadors, and Intelligence agents.

114. Eight kinds of lesser ones; Accountant, Executive Officer, Treasury Officer, Chamberlain, People's representative. Commanders and Commander of elephant battalion.

121. Serpent with 1008 heads: Named *Atisesha* that bears the weight of the world.

146. *Baladeva:* Elder brother of *Krishna*, and fair-complexioned.

147. *Tirumal:* Another name for *Vishnu*.

150. *Brahma:* First member of the trinity of Hindu gods; creation is his work.

152. Four orders of heavenly spirits: *Divakarar*, *Uruttirar*, *Maruthuvar*, and *Vasukkal*.

153. 18 kinds of aerial spirits: *Kinnarar* and others.

169. *Mayilai* A variety of jasmine flower.

193. *Kumil:* Big yellow flower *(gamari)*.

Canto 6

1. *Vincai:* a magical city in the Himalayas.

7. *Avunar:* powerful demons or *Asuras*.

   Amaravati: capital of *Indra's* heavenly region.

8. The *Cola* king: *Mucukunta Cola*.

21. *Tuti:* a percussion instrument shaped like an hour glass.

27. *Uncai:* capital of *Avanti* kingdom.

   Vintiyas: the mountain range that divides the north from the south

of India.

32. *Mayon:* another name for *Vishnu,* the god who preserves.

The four guardian spirits: the four castes were guarded by four different spirits.

34. *Kotukotti:* one of *Civa's* dances by which he burned down *Tiripuram;* as he clapped nis hands while dancing, this name was given.

Pantaranka: the dance of *Civa* performed for the benefit of *Brahma;* the purpose was to destroy *Tiripuram.*

37. *Krishna* and the *tusker; Krishna* danced while he broke the tusk of the elephant sent to kill him by Kamsan.

38. *Vishnu* and the *Avunan: Vishnu* defeated *Vanacuran* by this dance.

40. *Muruka* and *Curan:* God *Muruka* destroyed *Curan* in the sea, using the waves as the field of battle; *Curan* was king of *Acuras.*

43. Pot dance; *Krishna* danced holding a pot in order to release *Kaman's* son from the demon, *Vanacuran.*

44. *Kaman's* dance: In the form of a hermaphrodite *Kaman* danced so as to release his son from the city of Cho.

46. *Durga* dance: Goddess *Durga* destroyed the *Acuras* by using wooden legs to kill the snakes and scorpions of the enemies.

Lakshmi dance: By making the demons or *Acuras* fall in love with her beauty, she destroyed them.

47. *Indrani* dance: The consort of *Indra* danced outside the gate of Cho city.

63. *Kurankuceri* : an ornament for the thigh.

71. *Toyyakam:* a pendent joined to the head dress.

72. *Pullakam:* an ornament for the forehead.

111. *Karikalvalavan:* The warlike *Cola* king who ruled from *Pukar;* he conquered the Gangetic region also; he it was who started the fèstival of *Indra.*

121. *Vacantamalai: Matavi's* faithful maid.

Canto 7

13. Syncopation: a shift of accent in a composition that occurs when a weak beat is stressed.

Trills: rapid alternation of two tones, either a whole or halftone apart.

14. Glissandoes: rapidly sliding scales up and down the instrument.

Modes: any of certain arrangements characteristic of the music of Greece.

Intonation: utterance in a musical tone.

15. Orb royal: the white parasol of a king that is symbolic of justice.

35. *Varuna:* the sea-god; also the god of rain.

Canto 8

1. Hills of *Vishnu: Tiruvenkata* hills.

Kumari: Cape Comorin, the southernmost tip of India.

5. *Maran:* god of love

30. From *ulai* to *Kaikkilai:* the lowest octave to the highest note of the classical scale.

47. *Pittikai:* large flowered jasmine.

Canto 9

14. *Karpakam:* Heavenly tree that comes out of the cosmic ocean when it was churned.

16. *Arukan:* the God of Jain religion.

Catavakanan: a deity commonly known today as Ayyanar.

18. *Pacanta Cattan:* the deity that has mastered all the 96 works of theology.

20. *Itakini:* an evil spirit that eats corpses.

Canto 10

35. *Katam:* a distance of about 10 miles.

64. *Valai* fish: scabbard fish

126. *Aruku* grass: Harialli grass with whitish yellow rootstocks (Cynodon Dacty Pon)

197. *Varanan:* the city of *Uraiyur* or the city of the elephant.

Canto 11

20. Hurled his spear at the sea: *Ukkira Pantiyan* did it; he broke the crown of *Indra*, who had acquired 1000 eyes due to a curse by the sage whose wife *Ahalya* was ravished by *Indra*, disguised as the sage himself.

34. *Vishnu* and the 1000 headed serpent: God *Vishnu* reclined on the coils of this serpent.

45. *Cakkaram:* the disc-shaped weapon on *Vishnu* that keeps rotating always.

64. God's trident: *Civa* holding his weapon, the trident.

68. *Omai:* toothbrush tree.

69. Eyinars: hunters

78. Hill sacred to *Vishnu: Alakar* hill near *Maturai* city.

85. *Aintiram* - God *Indra* authored this book, it is said.

87. *Cilampu:* River *Silampu*

88. *Konku* tree: hopea; ironwood.

109. *Mankar:* magical words

112. *Garuda:* mythical bird on which *Vishnu* rides or flies; the flagstaff of *Vishnu* bears this figure.

118. *Om:* a word of solemn invocation before commencing prayer or meditation.

172. *Kuravam:* common bottle flower.

Maravam: white bastard cedar tree.

Canto 12

13. *Korravai:* the feminine aspect of *Civa*, known as *Kali*, *Durga*, *Cakti* or *Aiyai*.

66. *Tirumal's* younger sister: *Civa's* consort.

76. *Aucha:* Sal *(Shorea robusta)*

77. *Narantai: Citrus aurantium.*

Chay tree: Malay sandal tree.

81. *Punnai:* Alexandrian laurel tree.

106. The goddess who destroyed *Masheshwara: Kottavai.*

117. *Konrai:* Indian laburnum cassia, sacred to God *Civa*,

Tulavam: Tulsi leaf sacred Basil

Maruda: elephant rope trees

179. *Vetci:* Ixora flowers.

Canto 13

48. *Matavi* creepers: heptage madablota.

113. *Pitavam:* a wild shrub bearing fragrant white flowers.

Canto 14

Dharma: eternal law

50. *Nala:* one of the seven kings famed for liberality.

77. *Korkai:* name of an ancient town, famous for its pearls; situated near *Maturai*.

89. *Kotuveri* flowers: Ceylon redwort.

105. *Tonti:* harbour town in *Colanatu*

107. *Kutal:* another name for *Maturai*.

Canto 15

28. Goddess *Manimekalai:* created by *Indra* to prevent *Acuras* from troubling human beings.

33. *Mekalai:* jewelled gridle

98. *Ayars:* shepherds and cowherds.

Canto 16

50. *Yacotara: Krishna's* foster mother.

56. *Nappinnai: Krishna's* sweetheart; identified with *Radha*.

Canto 17

59. *Kural:* the first of seven musical notes (do)

Ili. one of the seven notes of the gamut (sol)

60. *Tutam:* tenor in music; the second tone of the gamut (si)

61. *Tarai:* one of the seven musical notes (fa)

62. *Uzhai: Ulai* .... (la)

Vilari: .... (mi)

Kaikkilai: .... (re)

76. *Mullai*

79. *Kuruntam:* wild lime.

84. *Mayon* and the calf: *Mayon* or *Krishnan* brought down wood-apples from the tree by hurling the calf at the fruits.

88. *Mayon* and the churning of the ocean: *Mayon* bore the weight of the mountain used as a churning rod.

102. *Yamuna:* river rising near the Himalayas, and entering the Ganges.

127. *Kuravai:* dance of the shepherdesses who sing songs in praise of *Mayon or* Krishna.

157. Colossal pace of *Vishnu:* In his *avatār* as dwarf, he measured earth and heaven in two huge strides.

158. *Pantavas:* the heroes of *Makaparata*

Canto 20

2. Plaint-bell: Tamil kings of old kept a bell outside the palace for any aggrieved party to ring and be heard.

31. *Korravai* and the monster: *Korravai* destroyed the monster, *Mahishan*.

41. Youngest of the seven chaste women: *Pitari*.

42. The one for whom *Civa* danced: *Kali*.

44. *Taruka:* the name of the *Acura* killed by god *Muruka*.

Canto 21

7. The fire and the flora: These came as witnesses to the marriage of a chaste girl at the instance of god.

14. *Karikalvalavan's* daughter: *Atimanti*.

Canto 22

88. *Maturapdti:* guardian spirit of the city of *Maturai*.

Canto 23

38. *Kirantai:* the name of the brahmin who left his wife alone at home.

Canto 24

55. *Centil, Cenkotu, Venkuntam:* holy places where *Muruka* temples are situated.

61. *Muruka's* six mothers: Saints' wives who bore the child *Muruka.*

66. *Velan:* one who possessed the supernatural spirit of *Muruka.*

84. *Valli:* the girl of the hill tribe who was loved by *Muruka,* and made his consort.

135. *Kolli:* a hill on the coast of Malabar.

Canto 25

139-140. *Konkars, Kalinkars* etc: kings who ruled over kingdoms lying to the north of Tamilnatu.

2. *Katampa:* Indian seaside oak.

Canto 26

56. *Prasad:* consecrated items given to devotees by priests.

151. *Kancukars:* a thousand trustworthy servants of the king.

Canto 27

8. *Nalikai:* a duration of twentyfour minutes.

153. *tulam:* one by thirteenth of a pound (weight)

208. *Kutavars:* the king and the people of *Kutanatu* or western kingdom.

218. *Marutam* mode--tune peculiar to the agricultural region

Canto 28

35. *Palai* and *Kurinci* modes: tunes peculiar to coastal and mountainous areas.

123. *Porunai:* a river in *Ceranatu.*

136. *Ayirai* eminence: a mountain sacred to *Korravai.*

190. *Porayan, Malayan:* other names for the *Cera king.*

Canto 29

27. *Pujas:* prayers by the priest

Canto 30

146. *Imayavarampan:* otherwise called *Cenkuttuvan.*

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